

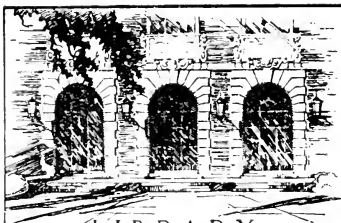


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# CLARA HARRINGTON.

A Domestic Tale.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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# CLARA HARRINGTON.

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## CHAPTER I.

“He who believes that a Being of Almighty power, unerring wisdom, and unbounded love, is seated at the helm of affairs, and is making every event promote, in its appointed measure, the highest happiness of all intelligent creatures, must possess perpetual serenity and peace \* \* \* \* The narrow precincts of the tomb can neither bound nor obstruct his enlarged view : it extends beyond the circle of the earth, and reaches to that celestial world where progression in excellence is infinite, and happiness is unchanging and immortal. Nothing can disturb his steady confidence. In the most awful moment of his earthly existence his feeling is sublime, as his destiny is glorious.”

SOUTHWOOD SMITH.

FROM the day of her calamity Clara had never once entered her painting-room. She

seemed to have forgotten that she had a profession. Her time at first passed in talking to Leonora, passionately and vehemently, on the subject that so painfully occupied her whole mind. Sometimes she tried to persuade herself that her convictions were erroneous, and implored Leonora to help her to this belief, and then utterly and disdainfully rejected as fallacious, the hope she had so earnestly cherished, and sunk into silent and profound dejection.

In this state she continued many weeks. No cheerful evenings now returned; no exertions which Leonora and Dr. Weston made to interest her had any apparent effect; yet this physician, who understood the maladies of the mind, no less than those of the body, returned to them in the evenings more constantly than ever, and encouraged the practice of reading aloud in Clara's presence, and of making the more interesting passages the subjects of conversa-

tion ; a practice which indeed had grown into a habit with them. He hoped and believed that, sooner or later, a spark would be struck out that would rekindle the latent fire, which he thought still slumbered in that desolate mind.

One evening Leonora mentioned the death of an eminent statesman of the day, who had been cut off suddenly in the prime of manhood, in the midst of a career which gave an extraordinary promise of usefulness.

The allusion to this event led to a conversation between the brother and sister, which produced on Clara and Bertha a very important impression.

After they had spoken of the attainments and virtues of this distinguished man, and endeavoured to determine, to their own satisfaction, the qualities which had secured, in so eminent a degree, the public confidence, Leonora observed that, at first view, the law of mortality seems fatal to human



progress, and keeps the world for ever in its infancy.

Dr. Weston took some pains to show, that this first view is not the correct one, and, amongst other reasons in support of a contrary opinion, observed that if, by this law, the excellent of the earth are prematurely cut off, the evil doer is also arrested in his course. But for this law, see what would happen! The accumulation of wealth by individuals would be enormous; the power it would give them would be most dangerous, and the corruption overwhelming. Ambition would have the time and the means to mature its most gigantic purposes; tyranny trampling on human rights and happiness would build up an impregnable fortress by the hand of time, instead of being destroyed by it; and persecution would pursue its victims till it had destroyed the spirit of freedom, and the ability and even the wish to think. As it is, the crimes

of the individual impair his constitution and cut short his life, thus preventing the general contagion, which would be the certain consequences of the security and the permanence of vice ; the projects of ambition cannot extend, from age to age, without the danger of impediment or change ; tyrants are not immortal, and persecutors must leave the world they desolate and deform.

“ Then it is by no means true,” he continued, “ that the knowledge and virtue of an individual perish with him ? For ages after he is no more the wisdom of one man often influences the destiny of large classes of his fellow creatures, and even of his country itself. The domain of science progressively extending and the range of the experience of social and political truths enlarging, a table land of knowledge is gradually formed, which the existing generation inherits from the preceding, and

from which all start as from common ground."

"Nay, but," said Leonora, "there is a decline as well as a progress in individuals and nations. The health and strength of the parent are not always given to the child, much less increased by the transmission; nations decline in civilization generally more rapidly than they advanced; it seems certain, also, that some arts have been lost, and that stores of knowledge, anciently acquired, have irrevocably perished."

"This has been the case, no doubt," replied Dr. Weston, "in what may be truly called the infancy of the human race. But this calamity is not likely to occur again. The press has rendered it impossible for the night of ignorance ever more to overshadow the world. The discovery of the art of impressing a few symbols on white paper has changed the destiny of the human race. It has rendered the dis-

coveries of science imperishable, and made them, in a greater or less degree, common to all civilized nations.

“There is yet another point of view,” continued Dr. Weston, “from which it will be seen that the law of mortality, instead of being the means of keeping the human race in a state of perpetual infancy, is one of the main causes of its progress in knowledge and goodness. Knowledge is progression; but progression has to displace and destroy, as well as to add and to build up. The removal, however, of that which has been established is no easy matter, and would, as a general rule, be impossible, were it not that the opposition of those who have grown old in prejudice and error, ceases by their removal from the stage; truth, at length, is allowed to be heard: it gains progressively a more willing audience; it conquers as it is heard and the result is, that the community is

educated in those very opinions which a generation or two before excited violent opposition, and even persecution. The youth thus educated are benefitted both by the new truths which are made familiar to them, and by their being thereby rendered capable of farther advancement. They, in their turn, imbibe prejudices which obstruct and prevent further progress: they, too, are dismissed from the scene; others enjoying the light they elicited, and unaffected by their doubts and difficulties, are borne by the spirit of improvement beyond the point at which their predecessors stopped; and thus the tide of mortality, though it may at first view seem, in its desolating course, fatal to the advancement of human knowledge, is, in reality, that very power, ever acting and irresistible, by which it is constantly carried onward."

"That is a view not sufficiently considered," replied Leonora; "but all doubts

and difficulty on this subject cease, if we believe the representation that what is called death is merely a passage to life."

"And a passage," observed Dr. Weston, "in traversing which the dross of mortality is left behind. The instincts and propensities which relate to the exigencies of the present state, bring with them infirmities which are a part of our common nature ; to which we cannot altogether rise superior, as long as we are encumbered with the present body ; and which appear to be incompatible with a state of perfect purity and goodness. It does not seem possible to eradicate these infirmities but by some such process as that of death. There may, therefore, be an absolute necessity for the dissolution of our corporeal frame, in order that it may be completely purified from the imperfections and stains which it has contracted here."

As he said these words Clara was ob-

served to raise herself slightly from the sofa, and, leaning on her arm, to listen very attentively.

“ We can easily conceive,” he continued, “ how, by such a process of dissolution as we know our bodies undergo, the most inveterate habits may be changed, and the most powerful associations broken. We can further understand how complete these changes may be rendered by the new objects, the new pursuits, and the new associations to which death will introduce us ; and not least of all, by the possession of that new body which we are taught will be prepared for us when at length we shall awake from the slumber of the tomb.”

“ A new body !” repeated Clara ; “ of what nature ?”

“ The authority which tells us that such a body will be provided for us is silent as to its nature.”

“ Not altogether,” said Leonora : “ it



tells us two things about it. It tells us, first, that it will be inconceivably more beautiful than the present, and, secondly, that it will be immortal."

"The only thing inconceivable in this," cried Bertha, her eyes sparkling with animation, "is, that such creatures as we are should have before them such a destiny."

"Yet," replied Dr. Weston, "if our faith is anything more than a mere name, we must believe in it."

"But can you conceive," asked Bertha, "how creatures so humble can be made capable of it?"

"We may suppose," replied Dr. Weston, "that it may be effected partly by an enlargement of our present faculties, and partly by the addition of new ones. We are probably at present very low in the scale of the intelligent creation, our understanding and our power being extremely limited. We are, for example, unable, in

the proper sense of the word, to make anything—the very simplest thing; we cannot create even the smallest particle of dust. We can resolve compound bodies into their elements; but we cannot again re-combine them, unless we study and obey certain laws which we can neither alter nor control. In like manner, we can analyse the constituent principles of living bodies, and resolve them into their physical elements; but we cannot, by any art or industry, re-combine them, so as to make the simplest living tissue. Even when we know the chemical principles of organized matter, we cannot so dispose these elements as to produce the smallest particle of organized substance. Nay, this is a very inadequate expression of our ignorance and want of power. Not only are we unable to produce the simplest living substance—a blade of grass, for instance—but we have no knowledge, not the most remote conception, of the *manner*

in which a blade of grass grows. We know the fact, but that is all; of the mode of the fact we are wholly ignorant. And so it is with regard to the entire range of human knowledge. We know some of the qualities of objects, and some of their relations to each other; that is, some of the effects which they mutually produce and re-produce: but the manner in which they thus act is at present concealed from us by impenetrable darkness. Now we are taught to hope that a time will come when the veil will be removed from our eyes, when we shall be introduced into a new world of light and knowledge, such as we might now enjoy, were we endowed with a new faculty, as appropriate for giving us an insight into this new world, as the sense of sight, for instance, is for making us acquainted with its appropriate objects."

"Would it not be a happiness to die

to obtain such a heavenly power?" cried Bertha.

"We have received the assurance that we shall realize this hope," resumed Dr. Weston, "partly that we may make a right use of the faculties we have. One of the most important of these is the power of transferring and fixing our associations from the present to the future. This is one of the noblest faculties by which man is distinguished, on the due exercise of which the dignity and excellence of his character mainly depend. It is by this power that we are enabled to rise above the hopes and fears, the importunities, the passions, the sorrows, and the joys of the passing hour, and to take a comprehensive view of happiness—the happiness not of a day, but of existence. But he whose soul is so occupied with one absorbing pleasure, or one absorbing grief, that he is conscious of

nothing else even in the present, much less in the future, denies himself the advantage of the highest faculty with which he is endowed to enhance his happiness, or to raise himself above his sorrow."

Clara, whose eyes had been fixed on the speaker with the most earnest attention, now said, in a voice scarcely audible:

"Ah!--I am one of those absorbed ones."

Dr. Weston went on, apparently without having heard her:

"All the great and good of the earth have given us examples of their cultivation of this faculty. It is, indeed, at the foundation of greatness of mind, which consists in acting with great views, from great motives, to accomplish great purposes. No one who cannot lift himself out of the present, and realize, or rather live, in the future, is capable of such feeling or action,

and often, indeed, he must fail in performing the commonest duties of life."

"I have so failed," thought Clara, mournfully, "and, I fear, from this very reason."

A silence followed, which no one seemed inclined to interrupt; for the trains of thought excited, each seemed disposed to follow out mentally rather than to express in words.

Dr. Weston himself broke the silence, by saying: "If, instead of being the final extinction of existence, death is merely a process by which our nature is purified and our faculties exalted, it ought to be regarded rather as the commencement than the cessation of life; as the passage from a mixed and imperfect to a pure and perfect portion of felicity; the end of all our labour in one state and the beginning of our happiness in another. This view is capable of exerting a most happy influence on the feelings and conduct of those who

truly enter into and realize it. When by this contemplation we have ceased to regard death as an enemy, and are enabled to hail it as a friend, a change wonderful and delightful takes place in the mind. All the feelings and associations connected with this object, before so full of terror, are reversed. Hope succeeds to fear, and joy to sorrow. Love, gratitude, trust, all the pleasing affections of the soul are excited, and as the best of all Beings is their object and the highest of all interests their source, these delightful emotions are produced in the intensest degree. The happiness resulting from this state of mind is not to be compared with any other pleasure, nor to be conceived by those who have not felt it. Its reflex operation, the manner in which it leads us to love, and disposes us to serve our fellow-creatures, to bear our own afflictions, to sympathize with the sorrows of others, and to console and relieve them;



in a word, the dispositions it generates, and the actions it induces are the most pure and generous of which human nature is susceptible. And these contemplations of death, instead of throwing a shade over the brightest moments of life, may be made the means of affording the purest and highest pleasure."

This passage seemed to produce on all present the effect of a choral anthem. It was as if

"Such music sweet  
Their hearts and ears did greet,  
As all their souls in blissful rapture took."

And for the moment, heart, ear, and soul appeared to be attuned to

"The fair music that all creatures made  
To their Great Lord :  
                    Whilst they stood  
In first obedience, and their state of good."

But there was one, especially, who

silently, in the secret depths of her heart,  
spoke inaudibly the concluding words of the  
beautiful ode :—

“Oh ! may we soon again renew that song,  
And keep in tune with heaven.”

And her prayer was not a vain wish ; it  
produced fruit.

## CHAPTER II.

“Nearer, my God, to thee,  
Nearer to thee !  
E’en though it be a cross  
That raiseth me.”

S. F. ADAMS.

CLARA, in a short time, retired to her own room and passed some hours in silent, but severe self-examination. The conversation she had just heard had roused her from her lethargy ; and though the re-awakening of her mental faculties was a restoration to a painful consciousness, since it brought with it the feeling of self-reproach, yet the simple but great truths which had been presented to her gave her strength to probe her heart to the bottom, and resolution to make an earnest effort to root out of it every mean and unworthy passion.

“Anger, jealousy, despair,” said she, “these are the emotions which had taken possession of me, since there was revealed to me the fact of the happiness of others. Why should this be? why should I allow myself to be the victim of these hateful passions? That it is a vicious state of mind is plain, from its effects. By their fruits ye shall know them! The selfish grief by which I have been absorbed has filled with anxiety those who take an interest in me, and I have been careless of their suffering.

“But is this my fault? Could I help it? Are not these feelings planted in our nature by the Author of our being? Was it in my power to control the dreadful events that have happened, or to alter their consequences—to change the feelings they produced—naturally produced—justly produced?”

“Justly? How? Was it then just to feel

that passion of hatred against one who had never injured me? Who knew not of my existence? and who, therefore, could not know that the happiness she drank in from those eyes; that the blissful emotions which thrilled through her frame at that touch, were the right of another,—the loss of which to that other, was more than the loss of life!

“Could I look but with envy—but with hatred on her happiness?—from such a source! I do not hate *her*! I would not injure her. Ah! are you so sure of that? Would you not deprive her of happiness—of *that* happiness? Yes, certainly: it is mine—mine by previous right.—But she knows not that—well, but *I* know it—and I cannot make the sacrifice—I feel that I cannot. God cannot require of us self-abandonment—self-annihilation—It is plain that He cannot demand of us any such requirement, for we cannot see the

justice of it, and we have no power to fulfil it!

“But He may require you to submit your will to his. *He* may demand of you this sacrifice? You do not know what his purpose may be in requiring this sacrifice at your hands! what it may be his design to work out for you—by you—and for him who is most dear to you. At all events, this may be the test to which He brings you, his creature,—that you do not set up your will in opposition to his will;—that you do not oppose yourself to Him who is your Creator, your Father, who loves you more than you can love yourself, and who will take care of your happiness better than you can do. Oh, that I could but feel that!—if this persuasion could but enter my heart—this heavenly belief would drive out the Demons which have of late possessed my soul, and leave it free to God—to duty!

“But then, my Gerard, that he should love

another—that he should be happy with another—this is the true cause of my agony, of my despair. I could give up all present intercourse with him. I have shown that I can reconcile myself to the thought of never again meeting him on earth. But then I have never for a moment ceased to believe that he loves me—that he cherishes my image in his inmost heart—and I still believe it. I will not doubt it. I will not give up this faith. I know that such love as his—that such love as mine is imperishable—Whatever cloud may rest upon it is but a cloud—a passing cloud which its own inherent indestructible light will dissipate. Oh, my God, I thank thee, that Thou hast again made me faithful to myself—to him—to Thee! With this hope, in this belief I feel that my prayer is answered, and that I can now already renew the divine song, ‘And keep in tune with Heaven.’”

An unwonted peacefulness descended on her. She felt reconciled to herself. She was again capable of loving others ; she again took heart. The renewed strength of her mind re-acted on her body. The blood flowed through her veins with a quicker and more invigorating motion, and she felt called back to life, and that she could live.

Her renovated mind was now too busy to admit of sleep. She took up a volume which was near her, and after turning over a few pages, her eye rested on the following passage, which was singularly in harmony with her present state of feeling, and which helped to confirm it.

“ One adequate support  
For the calamities of mortal life  
Exists ; one only, an assured belief  
That the procession of our fate howe’er  
Sad, or disturbed, is ordered by a Being  
Of Infinite Benevolence and Power,  
Whose everlasting purposes embrace  
All accidents, converting them to good.



The darts of anguish fix not where the seat  
Of suffering hath been thoroughly fortified  
By acquiescence in the will supreme,  
For time and for Eternity by Faith,  
Faith absolute in God, including Hope,  
And the defence that lies in boundless love  
Of his perfections : with habitual dread  
Of aught unworthily conceived, endured  
Impatiently, ill done, or left undone,  
To the dishonour of his holy name.  
Soul of our souls, and safeguard of the world,  
Sustain thou only can'st, the sick at heart ;  
Restore their languid spirits, and recall  
Their lost affections, unto thee and thine."

She next read the poem entitled the  
"Force of Prayer, or the Death of the  
young Romilly." In the bereavement of  
this poor mother who, like herself, appeared  
to be deprived of all the happiness which  
this world contains, her own sorrow seemed  
to be described, as in a parable, and the  
several scenes in the poem made an extra-  
ordinary impression on her mind. When  
at length she fell asleep each scene of the

poem was as vividly pictured to her mind as if she had actually seen it drawn on paper. Sleeping or waking the same images constantly recurred to her with precisely the same grouping and the same expression. She longed for daylight that she might obey the impulse which urged her to put down exactly all that she saw presented to her imagination. As long as she lay in her bed in the dark and quiet room she never conceived that there could be any difficulty in copying the wonderfully beautiful pictures which she saw before her with so much distinctness. But no sooner was she seated at her painting-table, with her pencil in her hand, than she found it impossible to convey even the faintest impression of the images which had been so vividly depicted in her mind. Each in its turn entirely eluded her as she tried to follow it and to retain it captive on her paper.

till her desire to embody these pictures

was so urgent that she spent hour after hour in the exciting but vain attempt. When she closed her eyes, back returned the pictures, with so much force, pathos, and beauty that she felt entranced as she watched them; but no sooner was her pencil in her eager fingers than the whole vision was dispelled. Whoever has tried for the first time, unassisted by the adequate knowledge, to draw from imagination, will bear witness to the bewildering and embarrassing chase after his own thoughts, in which he found himself compelled to engage, and his disappointment when, after innumerable efforts, he has succeeded in holding one or two of these phantoms captive, at their utter poverty and feebleness. Instead of drawing from the pictures of his imagination he finds that he can actually realize on paper only what he recovers from memory, and that, a memory confused and dazzled by the presence of

the materials necessary to his art. Even his pencils and paper are sufficient to dispel the immaterial creations of his excited brain. Could the painter delineate exactly what his imagination sees, then, indeed, pictures would become divine ; but it is only in proportion to the calm state of the artist's mind, assimilating, as it were, to the purity of his inspiration (which is a gift from heaven) that he can, in any degree, succeed in his attempt to realize his poem.

As for Clara, she sometimes thought that she had succeeded in her object, and that the pictures on her paper were identical with the images in her imagination ; and then again, when, after removing her eye for a short interval of time, she again looked at them, she fancied them mean and worthless. In this uncertain state of mind she resolved not to tell her friends how she was engaged ; and they, divining from her

altered face and manner that she was occupied in some pursuit that interested her, and that her excitement was of a happy nature, abstained from noticing the change to her by word or look. It was not till a week, at least, had passed that she summoned courage to show her drawings, and then only at a moment when she happened to be under the temporary impression that she had completely identified them with her visions. Still, however, she might be encouraged by the conviction, she was quite conscious that as soon as she had shown them to any other eyes than her own the charm would be broken ; that they would no longer appear to herself with the lustre which they at present derived from their secret association with her inspiration, and that henceforth they must stand on their own merits, simply as they existed on her paper. . How seldom does an artist possess friends at once so sympathizing and

so capable of comprehending the true merit of works of genius, unaided, as Clara's were, by science.

Turning pale with emotion, and blushing at what now seemed to her to be her own presumption, the agitated artist laid her drawings, one by one, before her three friends. For a few moments she dared not look in their faces; her heart beat violently; but at length she heard the words "Oh! how beautiful!" which burst from Bertha's lips.

Leonora did not speak; but she pressed Clara to her heart again and again.

"Do you not like them, then?" asked Clara, looking into her face.

"Yes, my Clara," she replied; "they are beautiful—they are wonderful!"

"Tell her so," cried Bertha, eagerly, to Dr. Weston, who was still silent.

"She does not need that I should tell her so," replied Dr. Weston; "she enjoys a

satisfied consciousness,—she knows that she has succeeded.”

Clara and Bertha were surprised next morning to find Dr. Weston in the room when they came down to breakfast, with three or four large volumes, and a number of immense rolls of paper, lying before him.

Before any questions could be asked, he said, gaily :

“I am come to set you to work, Clara. You are now to have no more rest or peace until you have perfected what you have begun. Your drawings are works of genius, and could not have been made without its inspiration; but they are not works of art. It is now your duty to study the means of making them works of art. I have collected together the best sources from which you can obtain instruction,”—and he busily opened volume after volume of the best modern works on painting; “and here,”

continued he, unrolling the scrolls, "are some anatomical drawings, which will be of considerable use, and we will study together."

Clara's eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"Yes," she said, "I will endeavour to make myself acquainted with the rules of composition. Perhaps I shall be able by degrees to find out how to avoid some of my faults; and then you will all help me to put my pictures together again."

"Remember," replied Dr. Weston, laying his hand on her drawings, "these must not be touched; these are sacred; these no art could give, no industry attain; these are your text,—you must now labour hard to be mistress of your art, without which you cannot give true pleasure, or make yourself understood."

"All this will be beautiful," said Leonora.  
"Bertha and I will sit to you. I will be



the Mother, and Bertha shall be the Young Romilly. And yet——”

She checked herself, saying mentally, “No, no—that will not do;” for the thought occurred to her, “If this should be a pre-sage of what is to happen!—if this part of the story should be realized! Oh! if I should ever lose her!” But she concealed her apprehension, unwilling to cast the shadow of sorrow over the new hope which had sprung up.

And now weeks passed like days, and days like minutes, to the industrious and earnest artist, in constantly advancing knowledge and acquirement in the pursuit of her art, and in the enjoyment of such happiness as the successful cultivation of art alone can give. Her study was pursued under peculiarly favourable circumstances. The subject which occupied her imagination was a fine one; the mode of treating it was revealed to her under true inspiration; she

had intelligent and sympathizing friends to encourage her to work out her designs, who were at the same time capable of giving her effectual assistance. It seemed as if Heaven had answered her cry for help in the midst of her desolation.

But delightful and engrossing as this occupation was, and divine as was its source, it was not possible for her friends to shield Clara from the sad realities which lay in wait to overshadow her path. She had at last ceased to expect with alternate terror and hope that Lady Ashford would return. Nothing was heard from her; she neither came, nor wrote, nor sent any message on the subject of the picture, and by degrees the conviction settled itself on Clara's mind that some part, at least, of the dreadful reality had become known, and this conviction was a sense of agony to her.

Grief that she had been unable to fulfil her own noble purpose, which she had hoped

would have been a holy message of love to *him*, mingled itself with terror, lest evil consequences should result to him ; and it was not long before another sorrow overpowered even this—sorrow for Lady Ashford—sorrow for the distress she must have felt, and must for ever feel.

For all this mental suffering there was no earthly cure ; nothing could be done, nothing alleviated ; it must simply be endured with resignation, and she had no resource but to lay down this heavy burden, with so many others, at the foot of the cross, and wait for that consolation which can descend alone from heaven.

Other disappointments, of a different kind it is true, but hard to bear, soon forced themselves on her notice. The profession which she had undertaken—by which she hoped to secure her own independence and provide for her child—threatened to be an entire failure ; nor was the inability to rea-

lize a pecuniary reward for her labour the greatest pain, but the constantly repeated disappointment of hope. Sitters came occasionally, and talked of pictures, but seldom returned to have the pictures actually begun ; and these few were, with one or two exceptions, personal friends of Dr. Weston.

It may almost seem unnatural that, with such great and heavy sources of affliction really pressing on her, Clara should have been able to feel these disappointments, arising from want of success in her profession ; but she had entered on her profession with all her heart, and had worked earnestly and perseveringly to prepare herself for it, turning away with a strong effort of resolution from the contemplation of her sad fate, to perform a solemn duty, backed by the sincere approval and help of her two friends. She did not know that the profession of a portrait-painter is one which depends not only on talent and perseverance, but that,

unless the talent is transcendent, it must in this country be dependant, in a great degree, on connection. It is more than probable that, had Clara's talent been placed under very favourable circumstances, it would have made its way to notice ; but her mind, depressed by sorrow, was soon cramped by Mr. Emmerton ; and though her portraits were free from his vulgarities, yet they never attained anything like the vigour and grace which, had she been able to do without his assistance, would have distinguished them. Connections she had none, except such as came through Dr. Weston ; and there were unseen, but ever-active, enemies constantly at work to undermine her reputation,—Mrs. Dalton and Sir Frederick Buckton. Mrs. Dalton's was open, avowed hostility, dragging in her name wherever it was possible to ruin and injure her ; Sir Frederick's was the quiet, creeping slander, which sought to insult as well as injure.

He did not fail to fulfil the promise he had made of patronage, and several of his friends had, in consequence, called at Clara's painting-room; but in every case it happened that, like the fools in the village-church, who, though "they went to scoff, remained to pray," they seized with avidity the idea of sitting to the beautiful young artist; yet no sooner were they in her presence than, without a single exception, they were awed into the most perfect respect before they had time to look or to utter the slightest impertinence. Thus disappointed in their expectations of amusement, it is not to be wondered at that they never returned to her house; and thus these repeated disappointments, concerning the real cause of which she was totally unconscious, seemed to be so many proofs of her inability to produce such pictures as would obtain success in her profession.

There was, however, one, a friend of Sir

Frederick's, who like the others called ; but the moment he saw Clara, resolved not to allude to the person who had recommended him to do so, feeling as if it were an insult to her to do so. This gentleman, Mr. Willoughby, not only talked of being painted, but really sat to her, and returned again and again, astonished, fascinated, and filled with a degree of admiration for her which he refused to acknowledge to himself ; but it was in vain that he tried every means to advance further in her acquaintance : her reserve was so natural, so quiet, and so determined, that, when the picture was, after many visits, completed, he knew as little of her position, and of her relations with the world, as when it began. Her unconscious influence produced an impression upon him as of a being belonging to a higher and purer atmosphere which he never forgot. In spite of her resolute avoidance of any approach to a further intimacy, he determined to bring

about a meeting between her and his sister, the fact of Sir Frederick's being the medium through whom he had become acquainted with her having faded entirely from his recollection.

In furtherance of this object he began to have a great desire that a picture should be painted of an old invalid uncle, who lived with them in Yorkshire. It was impossible that old Sir Ralph Willoughby could go to London, and it was very difficult to manage his temper so as to induce him to undergo the ordeal of sitting at all, and scarcely to be expected that any of the great artists of the day would give up their time or tolerate his caprices and delays (at least so Mr. Willoughby assured his sister) ; and at last he contrived it so, that Miss Willoughby wrote to Mrs. Merton, and proposed her paying them a professional visit.

“How am I to answer this?” said Clara, as she gave the letter to Leonora.



“Of course refuse to go,” said Leonora.

“But is it not very weak in me to refuse an opening which may lead to other advantageous results, and it cannot do me any harm to go? Other artists do it: why should not I?”

“Yes; but other artists are not liable to the annoyances which might befall you.”

“Neither are they proof as I am against all small vexations. After what I have felt in my life, it would be very difficult to make me unhappy at any vexation which might come, in the form of slights or shortcomings in respect.”

“Oh, it is not anything of that sort I am afraid of; for, in the first place, no one could fail in respectful behaviour to you as a lady; but I am afraid of some worse annoyance.”

“And yet,” said Clara, “if I am to continue my profession at all, I ought to do so

with courage ; therefore I will write and accept the invitation."

A carriage was in waiting for Clara where the stage-coach stopped at the end of her long journey, and in half an hour conveyed her through a handsome park amidst broad-spreading trees, to the entrance of Bromley Hall. Perfectly free as she was from any anxiety as to the treatment she was likely to meet with, yet, when ushered in, after the fatigue of a long journey, to a brilliantly-lighted room, amidst strange faces, her courage faltered for a moment, and it required all Mr. Willoughby's polite, and even kind introduction to his sister to take off a little from the desolate feeling which was beginning to creep over her. He then led her to old Sir Ralph. The old man, who had been dragged into the matter against his will, was predisposed to feel uncivilly to her ; but no sooner did his eye fall on her sweet, gentle face, than he in-

sisted on being helped out of his chair to hand her to the tea-table, where he loaded her with civilities and attentions.

Next morning the picture was put in process of commencement. Clara was quiet and composed, and seemed regardless alike of Mr. Willoughby's anxious attentions, and of his sister's somewhat cold scrutiny. As to old Sir Ralph, he was so charmed, so delighted with the gentle and respectful attention which Clara paid him, trying to make everything easy and pleasant, chatting so agreeably with him, and listening so patiently to his long stories and grumbling that the time passed away quite charmingly to the old man ; and he insisted upon it, that Mrs. Merton was the most delightful woman he had ever seen.

Several days passed away not unpleasantly to Clara ; she enjoyed the delicious air and noble park scenery, and was making rapid advances not merely in Miss Wil-

loughby's good opinion, but into her affections. One morning Mr. Willoughby, who rarely left the party, fancying that his presence in the painting-room was essential to keep his uncle in good humour, was obliged to go out on some shooting expedition ; the rest of the party were as usual busied about the picture, when some morning visitors were announced, and nothing would satisfy Sir Ralph but their being brought into the painting-room. They came, talking along, through the various ante-rooms and passages, and voices smote on Clara's ear which drove the colour back to her heart ; for in the midst of the gay party who entered were Mrs. Dalton and Sir Frederick Buckton. They were only appendages to the party of callers ; and Clara quietly gave way as the Dowager Marchioness whom they accompanied, carelessly drew away the picture and made her remarks on it.

“Is this the young person who is painting

it ?" she continued, looking at Clara through her eye-glasses. Then, without waiting for any answer, she abruptly talked to Sir Ralph of something else ; but although she praised his sheep and talked of his farm, the old man's whole energies were occupied in trying to get up to offer Clara his own chair.

At last he said, holding out his hand to her, "Come here, my dear lady—come and sit down by me ; I won't have you stand." Clara obeyed ; but in order to do so, was obliged to pass Mrs. Dalton, who, with a look of frigid and solemn virtue, carefully drew in her dress lest Clara should brush against it ; while she, on her part, was embarrassed with a bewildering uncertainty as to whether it would be proper for her to bow, or seem to recognize Mrs. Dalton. At this moment Sir Frederick, who had never taken his eye off her since he came into the room, stepped forward and seizing her hand, after flourishing

the other in the air as we see performed by gay old gentlemen on the stage, inflicting a violent shake on it—cried, “ Well, how de do?—How goes the world with you, my dear gal, since I saw you last?—I thought Willoughby wouldn’t let the matter drop when once he had seen you. Oh, he’s a cunning dog; isn’t he—eh? Capital picture you made of him tho’—capital!”

Miss Willoughby looked coldly astonished. Mrs. Dalton’s face retained the same frigid severity as, rising from her seat, she requested Miss Willoughby to walk into another room with her.

Clara, after disengaging herself from her tormentor, resumed her place before her picture, and occupied herself with it while poor Sir Ralph was dragged into conversation with his lady visitor, and Sir Frederick stood behind his chair, with his glass in his eye, staring without ceasing at the artist. The visit was a short one; but when they

were all gone, a change had come over the whole scene.

Sir Ralph had been led out to take his morning airing, and Clara was left alone. She heard Mr. Willoughby return, but no one came back to the room where she was, except, in a short time, a servant, who brought her in a tray with luncheon, and afterwards a note from Mr. Willoughby.

No longer in Clara's actual presence, pressed by the alarmed, indignant inquiries of his sister, he lost confidence in the truth of his instinctive convictions. The malice of Mrs. Dalton, and the impudent lies implied by Sir Frederick's manner, gained the ascendancy ; and as the safest course Mr. Willoughby, though not without extreme pain, consented to inflict the insult which his sister required, and he wrote, that " an unforeseen and most painful event compelled him to beg her to make use of the carriage, which should be at her disposal

whenever it was most convenient for her to return to Doncaster on her way back to London."

The note, though perfectly polite, was instantly understood by Clara, and "The carriage" had not five minutes to wait.

And thus in no long period a cloud was spread round Clara's fame, and the result was inevitable—her profession was destroyed.

Leonora perceived and understood the certainty of this occurrence long before Dr. Weston would believe that an injurious suspicion could be harboured against a being whom he knew to be so pure and noble as Clara. Leonora not only saw the fact now it had occurred. She had always been prepared for it; because she knew that, in a case like Clara's, the world always hunts down the victim, no matter how pure and noble.

There was but one consoling point in



relation to Clara's profession, and this was, that each year she had sent some little poetical picture to one or other of the exhibitions, and whether these pictures were well or ill placed, high or low, in the dark or the light, they were invariably sold, for whatever price she placed upon them. On all these occasions she always made urgent inquiries as to who the purchasers might be. Once it was a Mr. Brown, who gave no address, and who himself called for the picture at the close of the exhibition—another year it was a Mr. Thomson. But on no occasion did the same person ever become a purchaser another year, nor did any purchaser ever write to express his satisfaction with his picture—so that even this unexpected success was managed as unsatisfactorily and drearily as could well be.

But throughout this whole period there were for Clara hours spent in the pure enjoyment of the high and poetical part of her

art—hours in which the present time was as nothing to her—in which she lived as the humble and enthusiastic worshipper of all that is divine in that noble art.

Clara was destined to drink of happiness only from the highest and purest source—in the world she truly met with tribulation, but, thanks to the friends so mercifully given to her, she was of good courage, and overcame the world.

It was not till a long and fair trial had been given to her profession—nor till Clara's two best friends had consulted together most anxiously on the subject, that, one day, when a new disappointment had occurred which had depressed her very severely, Dr. Weston said, somewhat abruptly,—

“You have never succeeded much, my dear Clara, in miniature painting.”

“Then you think that I have failed, after all,” she replied, dejectedly.

“Failed, as yet, to get a connexion, cer-

tainly : though, in time, you would perhaps have succeeded even in that : but I do not advise you to wait to make any further effort. I am going to propose a plan to you which I have much at heart, and which Leonora agrees with me in thinking very desirable. It is that you should take a cottage in the outskirts of London, which you can get at less expense than this house. Leonora will share it with you, as she has done hitherto ; and I have plenty of work in view for you—all bespoke ; and what do you think it is ?”

“ I cannot imagine.”

“ What do you think of illustrations for books ? If you like to undertake the work, I have engaged it for you of a publisher, who is a friend of mine.”

“ It will be capital,” said Clara, her pale cheek glowing with pleasure.

“ It will not be quite so pleasant though, as you imagine : for you will never see your

beautiful designs engraved as you draw them. The engravers will *improve* them : that is their word for depriving them of their peculiar grace and beauty. This misfortune, however, you must make up your mind to bear ; and as your name will not be put to these works, and the drawings themselves will remain your own, you must not allow this annoyance to disturb your sleep."

"At all events it will not be such pleasant work as we have been doing," said Bertha ; for I suppose they will choose what subjects they please ; but still it will be very agreeable."

"It will indeed be agreeable," replied Clara, "if I can but do it ; and you may be assured I will do my best ; if it be only," continued she, turning to Dr. Weston, with a smile on her countenance, which gladdened his heart, "to maintain your reputation for good taste with your friend."

"I shall be very glad to get you all away from London," said Dr. Weston.

“Not more glad than I shall be to leave it altogether,” replied Clara ; “only we shall be at too great a distance from you, dear friend.”

“By no means. You must not flatter yourself with that hope. You are not to get rid of me—do not imagine it. I shall manage to be with you more than I have ever been ; for you must know I have great plans in prospect. I am engaged about a work which Leonora is helping me with, and I shall get you, and Bertha too, to give me your assistance ; so that I look forward to great results from our new home ; and last, but not least, I want to take our Bertha out of this unhealthy city, and see her at work in a garden instead of shut up in a London room.”

Dr. Weston had told neither Clara nor Leonora that he had for some time felt serious alarm about Bertha’s health. She had never been a robust child ; the acute-

ness and activity of her mind were always too great for her delicate frame ; but since the time when her mother's grief was disclosed to her, there was, at least to the eye of the physician, a visible change in her physical power. Mentally, she was more excited than ever, more in a state of preternatural exaltation ; but this was maintained at a cost of bodily strength which by no means favoured the growth of her frame into that of a healthy woman. Dr. Weston longed to see her occupied with a child's pleasures and interests, and he would not let them rest until a new house was found for them such as he desired.

## CHAPTER III.

“In the midway of this our mortal life,  
I found me in a gloomy wood astray,  
Gone from the path direct ; and e’en to tell  
It were no easy task, how savage wild,  
That forest, how monstrous, and how rough of  
growth,  
Which to remember only, my dismay,  
Renews, in bitterness, not far from death.”

DANTE.

“A dreary sea now floats between.”

COLERIDGE.

MEANWHILE the inmates of Lord Ashford’s stately home continued to move on in their ordinary course. Whatever emotions disturbed the tranquillity of their inner

lives, nothing unusual appeared on the surface. The state, the pomp, the unbending proprieties, the solemn gaieties, all bore their accustomed part in the family procession.

Lady Ashford herself, whose movements were duly observed and recorded in the court intelligence of the daily newspapers, surrounded by every advantage and luxury which rank, wealth, and beauty can give, held her place, admired and envied in the most brilliant circle of the most magnificent society in the world.

Her humble foster-sister, the only being in the world who loved her, alone knew that Lady Ashford's heart was the abode of anguish; alone knew how severe the effort was which enabled the unhappy lady to control herself, so as to appear in her family circle and the world, without an external trace of her inward woe. And so rigid was Lady Ashford's notion of what



was due to herself,—so habitual was her consideration for Lord Ashford, that she kept guard over her secret as watchfully as if her own life had depended on its preservation.

But this concealed anguish, which gained force with time, could not exist without either destroying her, or forcing for itself some outlet.

From confiding affection no help was to be derived, for even had her natural disposition permitted her to be unreserved with any one, she did not possess a single friend. Her parents were dead ; her sister, Mrs. Dalton, and her brother, were persons from whom, of all others, she was most anxious to conceal her grief. Mrs. Grey, indeed, might have been a true and effectual comforter ; but if the thought of her ever suggested itself to Lady Ashford, it was rejected. Often, on the brink of feeling a sister's love for that gentle and noble-

mind woman, some prejudice constantly came in as a bar to her doing so, and Constance's frequently proffered kindness was unaccepted ; but now a cause for positive dislike had arisen, which soon amounted, in her pent up heart, to a sort of hatred. This was the strong likeness between Bertha and her sister-in-law, a resemblance which seemed to press on her excited brain more vividly and painfully every time her eye fell on her.

Morrison, then, her foster-sister and waiting-maid, was the only witness of those long hours of wretchedness which were passed in her private rooms ; but even this spectator of her grief was not the confidante of its cause, but only a silent and deeply sympathizing witness of its effects ; never hazarding a question, or forming a conjecture, beyond the conclusion that her beloved lady was cast away among strangers, where

her happiness was wrecked, as, indeed, it could not fail to be.

Convinced that her mistress's earthly happiness was gone for ever, the desire formed by this faithful friend was to become the humble instrument of rescuing her soul from the peril in which companionship with Lord Ashford's family placed it.

Working constantly and skilfully on her lady's mind, by fear and hope, but principally by fear, the end she so ardently prayed for was at length accomplished, and she succeeded in prevailing on the sufferer to accompany her to the place where alone, in her sincere belief, help and salvation were to be found. This was a gloomy chapel. Here, amidst mystical and terrible denunciations, poured forth with fervid eloquence, the wretched, the penitent, were taught to lay down on a dark altar the sacrifices of a broken and contrite heart.

In the presence of that great and terrible Judge, whom she heard described as riding on the whirlwind and the storm, armed with a two-edged sword, to smite and destroy the wicked, Lady Ashford forgot her own personal sorrows, her mind became prostrated in abject fear, and it was not long before some consequences of this state of feeling became apparent in the family circle. The usual effect of gloomy, religious views is to shut out the pleasures and amusements of life, and the withdrawal from the routine of daily gaieties was now the great object which Lady Ashford kept in view, and the only one which she seemed capable of pursuing with steadiness and resolution.

At first, she was apprehensive of rousing suspicion in Lord Ashford. She, therefore, broke away carefully, and by degrees, from her usual engagements. She continued to accept invitations; but always at the last

moment pleading some excuse, she failed to fulfil them, and remained shut up in her own apartment. At last, she gained resolution to decline them altogether.

It is difficult to describe the annoyance which all this gave to Lord Ashford. It was, however, so constantly repeated that, at last, rather than expose himself to the mortification of hearing questions and remarks put to him, to which he could give no satisfactory reply, or incur the discredit of visiting without his wife, he also declined all invitations. Still the dinner-parties at home continued; but almost always about an hour before the guests arrived, Morrison was sent to say that her ladyship was indisposed, and begged to be excused from going down stairs. Then Mrs. Grey was requested, if her health permitted, to take the lady's place, or, failing her, Lord Ashford himself was left to do the honours alone.

But this state of the family necessarily lessened the agreeableness of their circle, and the world at length became aware that both Lord and Lady Ashford had entirely given up society. Whenever, in the coteries connected with the family, this melancholy fact was adverted to, Mrs. Dalton and Sir Frederick Buckton shrugged their shoulders, but said nothing.

Whatever disturbance to his arrangements, or his temper, this change occasioned to Lord Ashford, he made no remark or expostulation, nor permitted a word to be spoken before him on the subject. But, to the astonishment of Constance, he devoted himself to the task of endeavouring to enliven the long, dull evenings by reading aloud, when his efforts to promote an agreeable conversation, as too often happened, failed. She saw her selfish brother actually labour to remove the gloom and sorrow that evidently oppressed his wife,—a sorrow

which was changed to undisguised bitterness, whenever Constance made any effort to alleviate it; so that she had resolved,—and of late had strictly adhered to her determination,—not to interfere in any manner till a more auspicious time might come. Meantime, Lady Ashford would sit in some darkened corner, while Lord Ashford read from Milton, or Shakespeare, or others of the English Classics; and more than once, in the midst of his readings, Constance was startled and shocked by hearing a low moan of anguish from the unhappy lady, while her hands were clasped together, and through her closed eyelids the balls were seen strained upwards, as if in a paroxysm of agony.

Constance had been aware for some time that Lady Ashford had adopted opinions of a gloomy character, and would gladly have endeavoured to open to her more enlightened views; but when she made the slightest

approach to any attempt of this kind, she was usually coldly, and sometimes indignantly, repulsed. On one occasion, however, she was the accidental witness of a scene, which led her to suppose that there was some other cause than she had hitherto imagined for this deplorable despondency.

One evening, she happened to have lain down on a sofa, in the dusk of the evening, in a recess of the drawing-room, when Lady Ashford came into the room, evidently suffering under a passion of grief, moaning, and wringing her hands, with all the outward demonstrations of the feeling of despair. Constance was starting up to go to her, when she saw Lord Ashford advancing slowly forward from an adjoining room. The thought occurred to her that these two disunited, united ones might at last open their hearts to each other, and that perhaps the time was come when all their grief would be changed into love and joy. That



she might be no obstacle to so happy a consummation, she made a quiet effort to get, unperceived, out of the room; but she found that this was impossible, and that the only chance of continuing unperceived was that she should remain where she was.

Lord Ashford came forward, his whole face full of kind and most earnest sympathy; but the instant Lady Ashford saw him, she started up, and began to talk in a quick, sharp, cheerful voice,—now so unusual to her, that it sounded most unnatural and painful.

Lord Ashford seemed determined not to be so repulsed, and, by words, looks, and actions, tried to convince her that he had seen, and that he sympathized in her grief; but, to Constance's surprise, and even indignation, she turned hastily from him, threw open the piano, and played on it a loud, harsh, rattling, piece of music.

## CHAPTER IV.

“’Tis always morning somewhere in the world.”

R. H. HORNE.

THE summer sun beamed over the venerable gray walls of Ashford Castle, throwing into deep shadows its angles and turrets, dark with age and half overgrown with ivy. All around lay the noble park, its quiet green slopes, its stately avenues and spreading trees. The deer reposed in the shade, the swans glided on the waters.

A solitary rider, followed by a groom, slowly approached the entrance. It was Lord Ashford. He sat on his horse listlessly, and seemed to observe nothing of all the beauty that was around him. He turned neither to right nor left, but looked as if his mind were pre-occupied with painful thoughts ; once only he raised his head and cast a hasty glance at the windows that extended along one wing of the building, and his brow grew heavier as he did so. They were the windows of Lady Ashford's apartments, and the blinds were all down.

He dismounted, threw his bridle to the groom, and wandered away under the trees. Here and there he paused on his way, but not to admire ; it was some thought more heavy than the others that had arrested his steps.

He walked on towards the wall of the garden. Immediately beside it was a group of lofty cedars. Here he stopped ; he looked

up at the dark roof of branches, and they seemed to him to end in long wizard fingers pointing downwards with gloomy meaning. He looked at the ground ; it was strewn with the withered relics of former summers, and spoke to him of decay and death. He turned away and opened the door in the wall that led into the garden.

The deep shade outside increased the effect of the brightness that instantly flashed upon him. Here were beds of flowers of every splendid colour, rich odours, bees humming over their labours, butterflies basking in the light, exotic plants ranged in graceful order. Presently a sound rose above the humming and buzzing of the insects, that seemed, like them, in perfect harmony with the scene ; it was the clear, joyous voice of a child singing some merry song without words, and accompanied by the noise of a wheelbarrow coming rapidly along a gravel-walk. Directly afterwards,

Matilda turned a corner at some little distance, driving vigorously before her her barrow, laden with gravel, the spade standing up in the middle in workmanlike fashion. She saw her father instantly, and as instantly leaving her tools behind her, came bounding towards him, her arms held out to clasp him long before she reached him, her bright face beaming with joy. She was in his arms in a moment, burying her hands in his hair, covering his forehead with kisses, laughing, talking all at once ; while he, the lines on his face smoothed away, the gloomy thoughts all vanished, was laughing too, asking what right she had to carry off the gardener's gravel, and such playful talk. Now he must turn into a grass-walk with her, and be very much surprised to find Aunt Constance sitting on a garden-seat reading ; and now he must sit down too, and Matilda must place herself between them, a hand

held by each, and must tell him how much better Aunt Constance is, and that she means to come and sit there every fine day, and that they have done the lessons there to-day. Then he must go and look at Matilda's garden, and the new improvements in it, and the serpentine walk that Charles laid out for her before he went, and that she was now engaged in graveling. And now he proposes to take her a walk, which is a great joy to her, so she runs off to ask her aunt about it.—

“Do you really like me to go and leave you, Aunt Constance, dear?”

“I do indeed, my child, like you to go with him, and I shall order the poney-chair and take a drive, and shall, perhaps, meet you in the walks.”

The little girl then runs back to her garden, and gathers all the flowers she can find; they are not very many, for the frequent improvements are not favourable to their

arriving at perfection ; but she makes up a very pretty *bouquet*, takes it to her dear aunt, gives her several affectionate kisses, then takes her father's hand, and they set off.

Constance looked after them with eyes moistened with love and gladness. She saw that Matilda acted upon her father with an influence healthy and invigorating as her own spirit. Even now she was opening his eyes to see, and his heart to understand ; for nothing that was good or beautiful escaped her eyes, and she would not be satisfied until he also saw and enjoyed with her. Each bright and lovely thing they passed, she made him observe, and so they went on till their figures disappeared through the garden-door.

Having emerged under the cedars, Matilda let go her hold and began to dance round the ancient stems, in and out in a mazy figure. She "always danced there,"

she said. The brown and withered foliage that had suggested decay and death to her father's mind, to her only presented an elastic carpet for her active feet, and as her pliant and graceful figure bounded round and round, the sunlight glanced through the branches upon her. Lord Ashford looked up, and to his eyes it no longer seemed—

“ the cedars spread their shade  
With arching wrist and long extended hands,  
And graveward fingers lengthening.”

As they gently waved in the summer wind, they now seemed like outspread hands bestowing a blessing on the young head. He forgot himself ; he felt only a pure, unalloyed emotion of love, and a religious aspiration for the true welfare of that bright child.

And so they passed on together.



## CHAPTER V.

“And the earthen jug continued her story, and the end of it was like the beginning:—

“‘Now may everybody see that we are first in rank,’ thought the matches. ‘What splendour we have! what brilliancy!’ so saying they went out.

“‘Perhaps I, too, may get crowned!’ said the fire-tongs, and it was crowned.”

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN.

It is a common saying, that Providence takes care of fools. Whether Ellinor would have advanced her claim to special protection on such ground is doubtful; but it is

certain that the advantage of the principle was extended to her on more occasions than one. In spite of the expostulations of Mrs. Grey, she went, as we have seen, to the ball at Lady Buckton's, which she enjoyed thoroughly, without having one moment's disturbance, on account of the disapprobation of any one with whom she was connected. The wish of her heart was also further completely gratified, by an event which arose out of the visit. At Sir Frederick's instance his Lady invited Miss Grey to accompany them to the Continent, an invitation which, though it might be given with some reluctance by Lady Buckton on various accounts, was accepted by Ellinor with uncontrolled delight.

Mrs. Grey received on the morrow the intelligence of this invitation, and the further information of its having been accepted, with feelings of surprise and sorrow ; but she had no power to prevent the accom-

plishment of Ellinor's purpose. The consequences, however, were not such as Mrs. Grey apprehended. Not one of her anxious forebodings was realized ; for though Ellinor went and came, taking no pains to make any concealment of her plans and movements, yet so completely absorbed were all the inmates of the house, by their own particular feelings, that her absence was never even observed ; and if Lord Ashford knew where she had gone, or with whom, he never took the slightest notice of it, nor asked a question about her.

And here we will leave her to enjoy herself, visiting among several families of her acquaintance, but always making Sir Frederick's house her head quarters, satisfied that her peace of mind, and complete satisfaction in all the amusements which she so thoroughly entered into, would never be in the least interfered with by any uneasy, anxious, or weak solitudes concerning the

welfare of the friends whom she had left in England, for, as she herself remarked,—  
“ Why should they?”

It was about six or seven years from this period of Miss Grey's quitting England, that we once more turn to Clara, who no longer lives in London, but is quietly settled in the new home to which Dr. Weston had been so anxious to remove her. She is still occupied as she used to be, and we would stop to tell of all that these years have done for her, of her increased peace of mind, of her grateful enjoyment of those blessings still within her reach, of her gentle acquiescence in the disappointments that had attended her professional intercourse with the world, and of her perfect resignation to those greater trials which she had been called upon to experience ;—but there is a loud ring at the gate, and a visitor is ushered into the little studio, whom time has apparently touched with a very

lenient hand; for it seems to have added nothing to the still youthful figure that bounded sportively forward, but these few years and a great many flounces. Although they had only met once before, yet that meeting had been fraught with so much emotion to Clara, that she recognized Miss Grey at the first glance; and what a change those years had wrought in her feelings! what a difference between the calmness with which she now rose to receive her visitor, and the agitation which such an event would once have caused her! Clara was not, however, so well schooled in philosophy as to be quite without a slight pain, mingled with the surprise that called the colour up to her cheek,—surprise greatly heightened by the warmth of her visitor's manifestations of regard; nor could she help being at a loss to conceive why Miss Grey should sit holding her hand, or appear to be so<sup>1</sup> delighted to see her. After

the first excess, however, of her pleasure was a little calmed, Ellinor, always at her ease, leaped over all the barriers of ceremony, and was at full speed, asking questions, and telling her own news.

She had been compelled, she said, to return to England by the death of Lady Buckton, "poor dear!" and she had come under the protection of a sister of Sir Frederick's, Lady Somerville; they had come over to celebrate the marriage of Miss Somerville, which had taken place only yesterday.

Finding that Clara said nothing, Miss Grey went on to inform her that during all the long years she had been away, she had scarcely had any news about the Ashfords; for Mrs. Grey, though she had written often enough, always wrote such prosy letters and never answered one of her questions about them, and she should never have known anything at all, but for dear Sir Frederick,

who always told her all the news on his return to Paris from his various journies to England. "I assure you, you were not forgotten between us," said Ellinor ; "he is a great admirer of yours, rather more so than I quite like."

Clara did not make the expected reply, and Ellinor continued,—

"I think I told you that Sir Frederick is a widower now—but perhaps you may hear some day that he does not always mean to continue one."

A flush passed over Clara's cheek, but no answer came from her lips, and Ellinor was at a loss to determine what the expression of the countenance could mean. Had it been possible for her to conceive that any one could hear that name with a feeling of scorn, she would have perceived that there was a curl on the lip that looked like it ; but Miss Grey said to herself—

"It is quite clear that she hears of him

with emotion; he shall never come near her if I can help it."

In justice to Ellinor's real good nature, it is right to say that in all the gossip which had passed between her and Sir Frederick, the conversation was carried on in a different spirit from that which took place when Mrs. Dalton was one of the speakers. Ellinor's pictures were generally imagined in a kindly spirit, and promulgated, partly for the sake of the excitement of talking, but still more with a view to realize the romantic conception she had formed of the character of some person whom she had clothed with all sorts of fancied excellencies. In the present instance, on the first ill-natured inuendo thrown out by Sir Frederick, she enlisted herself with chivalrous ardour on the side of Mrs. Merton, and defended her so earnestly, attributing to her such qualities as it was pleasing to her imagination to suppose she possessed, that at



last she felt persuaded, not only that Mrs. Merton was as excellent as she was attractive, but that she was one of her own dearest friends. As to what had occurred when Lady Ashford sat for her picture, that remained a mystery which she could not solve, nor, in the attempt to solve it, could she get any real help from Sir Frederick. He indeed pretended the possession of knowledge to which she perceived he had no real claim ; nor did the manner in which he shook his head and smiled, nor the half sentences he uttered, intended to make her believe that there was a secret, and a very important one, which was known to him, but which he was determined to keep, impose upon her. She clearly saw that he really did not know what had happened, and inwardly resolved not to die without making an effort to discover the truth.

After the bustle of Miss Somerville's marriage was over, Ellinor lost no time in set-

ting out in search of Mrs. Merton, who, she was quite persuaded, was the friend whom she most earnestly longed to see in England. The difficulty she experienced in finding the object of her search, added not a little to the earnestness of her zeal in the pursuit of it. Mrs. Merton was not to be found in Devonshire Street, nor did the present occupiers of the house know anything of her. Miss Grey inquired in the neighbourhood at picture-shops and colour-shops, but in vain, till at last some one suggested that her name would probably be contained in the catalogue of the Exhibition, and there accordingly it was found. Ellinor knew quite well that she could have got effectual help in her search from Sir Frederick Buckton ; but she did not choose to apply to him, for reasons of her own.

An awkward pause had occurred in the conversation after Miss Grey's last allusion to this valued friend, which Clara filled up

by hoping that Miss Somerville's marriage would prove a happy one.

"Oh," said Miss Grey, archly, "the bridegroom, by the bye, is an acquaintance of yours; and between ourselves, I suspect he was once considerably smitten by you—Mr. Willoughby. You do know him, don't you?"

"I once painted his portrait," said Clara, very quietly.

Miss Grey resumed. "It is to be hoped the marriage will be very happy, of course; but people say—and I confess there is some appearance of truth in it—that the poor young man has been rather entrapped. Lady Somerville wanted the marriage, because Mr. Willoughby will be Lord Ashford some day, and Sir Frederick promoted it, indeed laboured very hard to accomplish it, but from quite another motive."

"Indeed!"

"He is *such* a wicked creature! You must know there has been a quarrel of long

standing between the Bucktons and Ashfords, in the course of which I have also been victimized, perhaps in more ways than one. Sir Frederick, knowing that Lord Ashford would rather that his title were extinguished for ever, and all other titles to boot, than that any one bearing his name should be allied with the hostile house of Buckton, made up his mind, for the joke's sake, that young Willoughby should marry Fanny Somerville, and nobody else ; and as he can carry any point he resolves upon, the marriage has taken place. Is it not a capital joke ?”

“She cannot get over her emotion,” thought Ellinor to herself, as she watched Clara's fixed eye and abstracted expression. Clara still remained silent.

Miss Grey continued, “I have a great mind to make you my confidante. The fact is—though it is a profound secret—I am engaged to Sir Frederick myself ! It will

make a great sensation in the family when it is announced, of course. What will poor Lord Ashford say and do ?”

Clara made no reply; and Ellinor instantly supposing that this silence arose from emotion at the intelligence which announced the irrevocable disposal of Sir Frederick Buckton’s heart and hand, out of delicacy of feeling changed the subject, and renewed her former one.

“Lady Somerville will be finely cheated if Lord Ashford marries again, and has a son.”

“Marries again !” cried Clara. “She is not dead ; how can he marry again ?”

“Lady Ashford is not actually dead, certainly ; but she will not live many months—probably not many weeks. It is ascertained that she is labouring under a mortal disease.”

“Good God ! I had never heard it.”

“Few have heard of it, for she has been

long abroad, in Italy, and always as much as possible away from him."

"Away from him!"

"She concealed it from him as well as from all others; indeed, she was more desirous to keep him in ignorance than any one else."

"What can this mean?"

"You surely know that Lord and Lady Ashford lived wretchedly together."

"Lived wretchedly together?"

"Most wretchedly; it is said that his treatment of her was the real cause of her mortal illness."

"It cannot be," cried Clara, no longer able to repress her emotion. "This is dreadful."

"It is very dreadful, but very true; and your quick and strong perception of it reminds me of the last time we met. Do tell me what happened between you and Lady Ashford on that day."

Clara was silent.

“What could it possibly have been? I have had the greatest curiosity to know, but have never been able to learn. Do tell me, dear creature.”

Clara was still silent, but looked pale and bewildered.

“What did you do to dear Lady Ashford the day she first sat to you for her picture? Did you ever finish it? I want so very much to hear how it all ended.” And she seized Clara’s hand in the energy of her request; but as she did so, Clara fell back senseless in her chair.

Miss Grey’s cries for assistance instantly brought Bertha into the room, who soon succeeded in restoring her mother to consciousness, and the very first use of it Clara made was to draw the face that was bent closely towards her, filled with a tender and sympathizing expression, yet closer, and to whisper, “Take her away.”

“My mother wishes to be alone,” said Bertha, and she motioned to lead Miss Grey out of the room. “Will you come down stairs with me?”

“What strange people they are!” thought Ellinor. “What can it be that took place that day? I never can rest till I find it out.”

She was led by Bertha into the drawing-room; and as she sat down by the open window, she exclaimed,—

“What a lovely little place this is! I had no idea there were such beautiful spots in this part of the world. What a very sweet room! I presume I am speaking to Miss Merton? You must excuse me for my rudeness in staring at you; I am perplexed by the belief that I have seen you somewhere before.”

“I believe you have seen me; but it must be eight years ago.”

“The resemblance is very extraordinary—I know the expression perfectly. Which



of the family is it whom you are so very like? Oh! I see—yes, it is she—it is Mrs. Grey!”

She continued her earnest scrutiny of Bertha's face, repeating :

“ Yes; it is my little Mamma; only you are handsomer. You are really beautiful, which she never was. Now I look at you again, I can also perceive a likeness to a person that it seems quite ridiculous to compare you with. Yet there cannot be a doubt about it. You are certainly very much like the most ill-tempered man in England. Are you really related to Lord Ashford?”

“ We make no pretensions to any such relationship,” said Bertha, gravely.

As this was said, they had reached the garden-gate. Ellinor had now no excuse for remaining, as she was not, by word or look, invited to prolong her visit; yet she appeared still to have something more to say.

“My dear Miss Merton,” she continued, “my most intimate friend, my *fiancé*, Sir Frederick Buckton, was formerly acquainted with your Mamma. It is most likely that he will again wish to call on her and you, as he knows my great regard for you both. It appears to me, however, that you both rather court retirement; shall I say that you would rather not receive any but your most intimate friends at present?”

“Say, if you please, that it would not be possible for my mother to receive Sir Frederick Buckton.”

Here was a fresh proof that there was some mysterious relation between these Mertons and the Ashford family. What the nature of it might be Miss Grey could not surmise, though, as she drove back to town, she exhausted conjecture to arrive at some probable conclusion. She earnestly desired to discuss the subject with Sir Frederick Buckton; but as they wished to

receive no visitors, it would not be right, she thought, to mention their names to him. Was this the real motive of her silence? She could not maintain the self-deception; and, before she reached London, she was compelled to acknowledge to herself that she would rather such a susceptible heart as his should not be exposed to the danger of seeing that lovely mother and daughter, all their charms heightened by the beauty of their elegant little dwelling-place.

## CHAPTER VI.

“Oh, my dear Father,  
Restoration hang upon my lips !”  
SHAKSPERE.

ON the very morning of this interview between Miss Grey and Mrs. and Miss Merton, an event took place in the Ashford family, which materially changed for the future the position and relation of every member of it.

Matilda was on the watch, as usual, to join her father in his study as early as

was practicable after he had received the letters of the morning. It was no uncommon thing for the contents of those letters to occasion a great temporary increase of his ordinary state of gloom and moroseness. When he received intelligence which produced this effect, Matilda's presence seldom failed to exercise a soothing influence over him—a result of which he was himself scarcely conscious. Often not a single word passed between them; very rarely, indeed, did he speak to his child of the subject that occupied his thoughts; and yet all the tenderness of his passionate nature had been constantly becoming more and more concentrated into one intense feeling of love for this being, on whom, without reproach, he might bestow affection without bounds, and for whom the feeling grew ever the stronger that it was pent up in his own bosom, carefully concealed from all eyes, and as much as possible even from his own.

But there were eyes from which it could not be concealed, that penetrated to the very depths of the solitudes of his gloomy heart, and that saw there, in its brightness, the single flame that saved him from despair. And those eyes saw with equal distinctness the necessity for their soothing influence over that heart, apparently so cold and still, but often ready to burst with terrible emotion. From her childhood, Matilda knew and felt that she was dearly loved, and the playful, and sometimes even noisy, expression of the happiness of a joyous nature—all the sources of happiness of this blessed age being rendered available to her through this consciousness—was never, in a single instance, wonderful to say, repelled by him. The habit of giving and receiving the tenderest expressions of affection, on the part of daughter and father, grew with her advancing age. As her mind developed, the charm of her love

increased, and her manners, innocent, playful, and free, indicated not fearlessness so much as faith—faith which could never be disappointed or repelled, because it called into activity the love in which it had its source, and created the medium through which nothing is seen but as affection desires.

On the present occasion Matilda, with that presage of evil which watchful tenderness so often derives from its quick perception of the shadows of coming events, was lingering with unusual impatience at the drawing-room door, for the return of Travers from her father's study. It was her custom every morning, shortly after the letters were delivered, to enter the room quietly to prepare his breakfast. This morning Travers remained in the study unusually long, and when at last he came out, he opened and shut the door silently, as if he wished not to be heard, and then began to walk very slowly.

“ Why have you stayed so long this morning, Travers ? ” asked Matilda.

“ Hush ! ” replied he, making a sign that she should remain silent.

“ I must go in to make papa’s breakfast.”

“ I am afraid, Miss Ashford, my lord has not received good news to-day ; I have seldom seen him so much affected.”

“ What can have happened ? ” cried Matilda, and sprang towards the door, at which she knocked.

No answer came.

She knocked again : still no answer.

Again and again, but no answer was returned.

She listened anxiously ; she thought she heard a groan ; she instantly opened the door.

There lay Lord Ashford on the floor quite insensible, blood trickling from a wound on his forehead, received from some angular



piece of furniture against which he had fallen.

“Oh, dearest, dearest papa,” cried the terrified girl, “what has happened to you?”

Her words made no impression. She stooped down, lifted his head, and laid the cold pale face in her lap.

As she did this, the eyes half opened—moved—and looked into hers, and now the blood in part returned to his lips, which she kissed again and again, pressing the head, which she still supported tenderly, to her bosom.

“Oh, papa,” she said, “you are very ill—what shall I do? How can I help you?”

He continued to gaze on her with a strange expression, making an effort to speak, but unable to articulate a sound.

Matilda’s terror increased, and she said:—

“I must have help—I must call Travers.”

These words seemed to recall Lord Ashford to consciousness, and he said in a distinct and somewhat stern voice :—

“Let no one enter this room. I must be alone.”

“But not without me ! You would not drive from you your little girl, at such a moment ;” and she folded her arms more closely round his neck.

Lord Ashford again gazed on her with a bewildered look ; but he allowed himself to be held passively in her arms.

Thus they remained a few moments, Lord Ashford apparently again relapsing into a state of unconsciousness. As if to prevent this dreaded event, she cried gently, but with a voice tremulous with fear and grief,

“Oh, do not lie on the ground ! Let me help you to get up—let us together try—”

The tone of the voice—the action of the arms again roused him.

“What is it?” said he, looking round in bewildered astonishment, not at all aware that he was not sitting in his usual chair.

Matilda exerted all her strength to lift him from the ground—an effort which he himself seconded, and with great difficulty he regained his feet, and staggered to the sofa.

Matilda again begged him to allow her to call for assistance ; but he said he needed none, and desired to be alone. Suddenly she saw him crush a letter which he still held in his hand ; and then he gave way to a paroxysm of violent, ungovernable grief.

Without his perceiving it, she knelt down by his side, laid her cheek as a pillow for his to rest on, and placed his arms around her neck, so that at last he leaned with almost all his weight upon her, clung to her, and she thought pressed her to him, the idea lighting up for a moment in her coun-

tenance an expression of radiant joy. What a contrast at that moment between the two faces that now rested on each other !

When at length he returned to a consciousness of her presence, he fixed his eyes upon her with an expression of intense suffering, and pronounced her name in a tone of voice that made her shudder.

“ Matilda !” cried he, again pausing, his eyes still fixed upon her with that peculiar expression.

“ What have you to tell your child ?” said Matilda. “ I will bear it. I will help you to bear it.”

“ Matilda,” repeated that voice, “ you have lost your mother.”

Matilda fell upon her father’s neck, clung to him convulsively and sobbed aloud.

That sound seemed to rouse her unhappy father to fresh agony. “ Do you not know,” he said, “ that I have killed your mother ?”

“Why do you say such a dreadful thing to me?”

“Because it is true!”

“Oh no, you would have laid down your own life to save my mother’s.”

“I would have done more, I would have sacrificed the happiness of life to have secured hers. I did make the sacrifice, and yet I have failed.”

“That, then, has been God’s will,” said she earnestly, “and not yours.”

“You must know me as I am,” said he, replying to his own thoughts, and not to her words. “I will no longer endure the torture of being thus misunderstood.”

“I do know you, and I love you. You know how I love you.”

“By a certain course of conduct I have broken your mother’s heart ; she has died from this cause, and no other.”

“But you intended and tried to make my mother happy.”

“Most sincerely—most earnestly—yes, and most perseveringly. God is my witness !”

“God is your witness ! She too is your witness : she is now looking down upon us : she is asking you to let me be to you what she would have been. Will you not give her this last proof of your love ? Will you not let your child—your own beloved child—be your comfort ?”

Lord Ashford moaned, and pressed the young hand that grasped him, between both his own.

She knelt down beside him, and continued :

“Papa, when two men are friends, they lay open to each other their thoughts and actions, that they may give and receive help and comfort. Let me be to you such a friend.”

He was silent.

“I do not ask you to tell me anything

you do not wish to speak of. I only beg of you, when you are unhappy, not to try to hide it from me : you never *can* hide it ; but oh ! call me to you—say to me that you want to rest your head here ;” and she drew his head gently on her bosom. “ You will then know that the friend who loves you is near you, and you will feel that, without perhaps understanding your exact sorrow, she can sympathize with you with her whole heart. Will you do this for me—for mamma ?” she added, solemnly.

He started ; but she drew him back to her, and looked earnestly with her large searching eyes into his.

“ Yes,” he said ; “ I promise.”

Thus they remained looking into each other’s eyes, till they felt that they were one, and that no sorrow in life—that death itself—could never again separate them.

## CHAPTER VII.

“ The little fountain flows  
So noiseless through the wood,  
The wanderer finds repose,  
And from the silent flood  
Learns meekly to do good.”

GOETZ.

THE new and delightful feeling of sympathy and confidence which this interview established between daughter and father was strengthened in Matilda by a conversation which shortly afterwards took place between her and Constance.



“How deeply do I now regret,” said Matilda, “that I never knew my mother!”

“You have cause to regret it,” replied Constance; “but your very tender age prevented you from giving her the comfort of your sympathy and help.”

“But young as I was, if I had been thoughtful, I might have obtained some insight into the truth, and through that have brought her comfort, and perhaps help.”

“Yes, it is very possible; and you have true cause for regret, but I hope none for much self-reproach. Most persons have occasion to regret that they have not properly appreciated their friends. It is no uncommon thing for death to take from us our dearest friends before we know them; and when they have passed from us for ever, a fresh light sometimes breaks in on the circumstances that surrounded them, which causes us to modify materially our view of their feelings and character.”

“I wonder I did not perceive that my mother was unhappy. You say I have escaped self-reproach. Oh! you do not know how bitterly I have reproached myself for the impatience and irritability which sometimes I felt towards her. I confess to you,—and I do it with shame and sorrow,—that I sometimes thought her unjust and capricious to papa—to you—to me.”

“She must have appeared so to a child :—until, by degrees, I came to understand the intensity of her suffering, she sometimes did so to me.”

“But you did not understand the real cause of her unhappiness?”

“She never admitted me into the secret of her heart.”

“Then there was a secret?”

“I very much suspect it was some grievous misunderstanding—some delusion into which she had fallen.”

“Something connected with my father?”

“Yes.”

“It was so : the words which almost unconsciously escaped from my father the other morning confirm your suspicion.”

“They were both too pure and good to have given to each other any real cause for the dreadful suffering that sometimes overwhelmed her.”

“Yet my father reproaches himself with being the cause.”

“If he were so in her imagination, however innocently so, such is the nature of his mind, that he would reproach himself as deeply as if he were the real and sole cause.”

“What can it be?” cried Matilda, rising suddenly, with clasped hands, and walking hurriedly across the room. “Oh, that I could fathom this mystery ! It is really necessary that I should do so, in order

that I may know how to comfort my father."

"By no means," replied Constance. "In the cure or mitigation of the diseases of the body, it may be necessary to know the cause and seat of the malady ; but this is not the case with mental maladies : with reference to these, it is sufficient to know that there is suffering."

"I know it would be wrong to speak to him on this subject, and wicked to attempt to surprise the secret from him."

"It would be entirely wrong ; and it would also be in vain : the slightest perception or suspicion of such a desire on your part would lock up his heart in impenetrable reserve, —perhaps alienate him from you for ever."

"What a dreadful thought !" cried Matilda. Oh, that he would open his heart to us, to both of us, as to his dearest friends !"

"To you he may do so—it is possible—

I have even hope of it—with me it can never be.”

“But you have often told me that when you were children, when you were at my age, he really did so.”

“No, never.”

“Never?”

“Not, I believe, in a single instance in his life.”

“You were his chosen friend—you, and no other.”

“He was inexpressibly dear to me—I was also dear to him : he loved me more than he did any other human being : he even relied on me, and I was able to be of help to him in many ways ; but he never gave me his confidence ; he never felt a real, confiding love towards me.”

“But he is different now, dear Aunt Constance ; he is not like what he used to be : if you could but have seen him as I saw him on that morning (and the thought

of what took place, miserable as it was in some respects, will be a blessing to me as long as I live), you would see that sorrow has opened his heart."

"To you, I trust, it has opened his heart; to you, I trust, it will open and soften more and more, till you are able to give him, what has hitherto been denied him, the blessedness of a confiding love."

"Oh, if I could but give him that—if I could but make him love me as I love him—would it not open to him a new life!"

"It would open to him a heaven of joy and bliss of which he has never yet had a taste, no, not any conception."

"Then you will teach me how to do this," cried Matilda, fervently, "dearest Aunt Constance, you will help me."

"Your own heart will teach and God will help you."

"But you have taught my heart, and

God has given and will give me help in you."

"Yes, you are the true interpreter, I verily believe, of our heavenly Father's purpose and plan. I could not accomplish my object—I tried earnestly, most perseveringly. I have failed—you are the chosen instrument. Go on, then, in this work to which your heart calls you, and God speed you!"

As she spoke, Constance drew Matilda towards her, and the young girl's eyes looked into hers with a radiant and inspired expression.

"I have accomplished my work in you, by you," resumed Constance; "what I have not been allowed to do of myself, I am permitted to accomplish through you. Your look, the expression of your face has carried the conviction to my heart: at this moment I feel the reward of my life, that life hitherto so barren, hitherto apparently one continued failure."

“Yet you have been succeeding all this time ; you have succeeded even in him ; you have succeeded in me to your own heart’s desire, and if your success, complete in me, should make your success in him also complete, will not that be a heavenly happiness, dearest aunt, my more than mother !” And Matilda threw her arms round that dear friend, overcome with emotion.

“What do I not owe you ?” she continued, as soon as she had gained a little composure, “you have made my whole life so blessed, that my only real sorrow has been the knowledge I have acquired that others are not equally happy ; but you will help me to make them happier, *him* especially ; that is,” continued she, fervently, “you will help me to teach them to love.”

“Dearest child, you have already taught your instructor ; you have already sounded the depths of a true love ; in the opening of your life you already see the true hap-



piness of life ; it is the highest lesson even in Christian philosophy which many die without perceiving, but which you have the blessedness of feeling in your youth.”

“ Oh, Aunt Constance, you are the source of all ; and one thing at least is sure—is it not ? We can never cease to love one another ; nothing can come between us to separate us as long as we both live.”

“ No, nor after we die,” said Constance ; “ our love will be eternal ; it has in it the elements of immortality ; and it gives the true earnest of this in the blessedness it sheds on life. To see you as you are, to look forward to what you will be, is the solace and joy of my heart. You have renewed my youth, so that I may say of myself as is said of Job, ‘ The latter end is more blessed than the beginning.’ ”

## CHAPTER VIII.

“ Now I dare not say,  
I have one friend alive ; thou wouldst disprove me.  
Who should be trusted now when one’s right hand  
Is perjured to the bosom !”

SHAKSPERE.

MATILDA’S resolution to do everything in her power to prevent Lord Ashford from relapsing into his former cold and stern reserve never failed her, though the task was difficult, and required constant attention and exertion. She was encouraged in these efforts partly from their general success, and partly because she entertained the hope

of receiving an able coadjutor in Charles Grey, who was daily expected to return home.

Charles Grey was, she thought, both from his own happy nature, and from the estimation in which he was held in the family, better calculated than any other living being to assist her in her purpose. Handsome in person, frank and winning in manners, more than commonly intelligent, and highly cultivated, he possessed the qualities which win affection, and his presence in the family was universally felt to be an influence at once refined and cheerful. Perhaps, from the very contrast he found to his own manner and character, he was particularly charming to Lord Ashford, who loved him, next to Matilda, better than any other living being in the world. He was also proud of his talents, certain of his integrity, and assured that his future career would reflect honour on all con-

nected with him. In the bottom of his heart there was cherished a dearer hope. He had deeply felt the suffering resulting from marriage without love, and he resolved to save his beloved child from a similar calamity. Instead of projecting any great alliance for her, his earnest desire was to marry her to Charles Grey, whose amiable qualities, he thought, could not but attach her, and whose sterling worth of character would be the security for her happiness.

In furtherance of this purpose, which, with his usual reserve, he concealed from every one, he had given Charles a very careful education, placed him at college under tutors in whom he had confidence, and encouraged him by every means in his power to earn and to deserve the reputation of a scholar. The pursuits of science were, in themselves, agreeable to Charles, and his attention to his college duties was also stimulated and sustained by a feeling

of conscientiousness. He felt that the means of study so liberally afforded him by Lord Ashford ought to be faithfully and earnestly used by him. They were so used that he took high honours, and owing less to the discipline of the college than to the direction and exercise given to his mind by the excellent private tutor provided for him, he left the university with a mind stored with knowledge ; and, what is of far greater importance, with intellectual faculties developed and disciplined, capable of grappling successfully with whatever subject the business or the duties of life might require him to master.

On leaving the college he spent two years abroad, having introductions to the distinguished men in the several countries he visited, and being received in the highest circles. It was a sincere gratification to him to trace, in the different countries of Europe, the progressive advancement of

civilization; the means, different in each nation, according to the genius of the people and the fundamental principles of the rude institutions left them by their forefathers; but everywhere he saw the struggle which modern intelligence is making to solve the great problem of improved government; and it was deeply interesting to him to observe the mode in which that intelligence was working, to modify, with reference to this end, the existing institutions to be dealt with. His intercourse with the philosophers, poets, and statesmen, the real workers of these beneficent changes, many of them unconscious of the end they were the instruments of accomplishing, and some not even approving of it, tended to enlarge his views, to awaken his attention to the secret and really important social and political influences; to correct the errors of a conventional education, such as is given in all our schools, perhaps, without any exception,

and to excite an ardent desire to turn to account, for the guidance of his own public course, both the failure and the success which he witnessed.

Lord Ashford received with a satisfaction, that formed one of the few real pleasures he enjoyed, an account of the favourable impression made by his protégé on two or three persons whom he regarded as among the most enlightened and influential men in Europe; and the promise which, in their opinion, he gave of eminent success in public life, determined him to place Charles in Parliament. An opportunity of doing so having occurred, Charles received a summons to return to England immediately. He did not come. He was again urged to lose no time in returning; but before he replied to the summons, the news arrived of Lady Ashford's death, which suspended, as we have seen, all other projects, and absorbed all other thoughts in this family.

The time had now come, however, when Charles was daily and even hourly expected to make his appearance at home. One person in particular, who expressed the greatest impatience at his delay, if she was not really the most earnest for his return, was our friend Miss Grey, who was once more numbered with the family at Grosvenor Square. Lady Somerville had not only left town without asking her to join her gay party to the country, but had had the malice to tell her that she felt it impossible to be so selfish as to deprive her friends of her company any longer; so that Ellinor was obliged to take the hint, and retreat to the shelter of Grosvenor Square; an abode where, in her estimation, supreme dulness always reigned; but which, of course, was now certain to be worse than ever, shut up, as it was, as the house of mourning. Charles's expected return was the only circumstance that afforded to the



disconsolate Ellinor a gleam of comfort, and comfort she really needed; for, in addition to Lady Somerville's desertion, Sir Frederick Buckton had also left town for a time.

Charles was as dear to Mrs. Grey as to Lord Ashford, and her confidence, or rather her hope, that the promise of his early youth would be fulfilled, was as great, though sometimes she was not without apprehensions that the nature of his education, and the associates whom Lord Ashford preferred for him, would establish opinions and views of life widely opposed to her own, and from which she would gladly have protected him. Over these circumstances, however, she had no control, and her trust was, that his noble and generous nature would eventually lead him to aims and to a course equally noble and generous.

Reasonable as were the anticipations of pleasure from Charles's return, they were

not realized. Lord Ashford and Matilda were in the hall, to welcome him as he entered the house. Lord Ashford himself looked almost happy, and his reception of the young man was such as the tenderest father would have given to a favourite son. Matilda's eyes were moist with tears of pleasure, and her impulse was to throw her arms round the neck of her cousin, as she familiarly termed him; but her forward step was suddenly checked. There was something in his manner that repelled her, —a cold gravity that chilled her; the look with which she saw he regarded her father, —the manner in which she thought he shrunk from him, made the warm blood that had flushed her cheek flow back cold and oppressive to her heart.

The manner in which Charles thus received Lord Ashford's demonstrations of affection would not have been perceived by a common observer, and was not noticed even by

Lord Ashford himself. Neither did Charles, on his part, appear conscious that it was observed, nor did his feelings of estrangement or aversion extend to Matilda, to whom he was frank and cordial. It was only when the beautiful hand which he touched for a moment gave to his no pressure, but fell down coldly at her side, that he saw that her searching eye, or rather her unmistaking heart, had discovered the true feeling of his own.

Shocked at the impression he had given, he exerted himself earnestly to appear cheerful and happy, and to recall Matilda's affectionate cordiality; but he continued to keep aloof from Lord Ashford, scarcely ever looking at him, and when he did so, with a cold and strange expression. This appeared to be quite involuntary on his own part; but it was not the less manifest to the watchful Matilda, in whom it produced such great and undisguised distress, which his

attentions to herself only increased, that he at length gave up the attempt to engage her in their usual familiar chat, and withdrew from her side, silent and embarrassed.

Mrs. Grey also perceived something strange and unfamiliar in his manner, as if it were not Charles who had returned to them : as to Ellinor, though she saw that he was handsome, and that, as far as regarded his appearance, he was all she could desire in a brother, she was grievously dissatisfied with the unbecoming gravity, that seemed to have taken the place of his merry, careless frankness, and half an hour after his arrival she had turned away in disgust, and resumed her book with a shrug of despair.

When they were alone together, Matilda, with her usual sincerity, threw herself down before Mrs. Grey, and burying her face in her lap, cried,—

“ Oh, Aunt Constance, I wish Charles had never come back to us. Why did he look

at papa in such a strange manner? Papa, who loves him, and was kinder to him than I ever saw him before to any one! Why did Charles look with such a cold unfeeling eye at him?"

"Charles looks unlike himself indeed."

"There must be some cause for it. I hope indeed there is, for one must cease to have any regard for him, if such conduct could be the result of caprice."

"I think he feels deeply the loss we have sustained, my darling; you know how very kind *she* always was to him."

"But that would fill his heart with sympathy for those to whom she was the most dear, and who have sustained the greatest loss."

"It should have had that effect, and I expected that Charles's heart-felt sorrow, would have manifested itself in tender sympathy to every member of this mourning family."

“ To papa especially, who has the greatest need of comfort.”

“ Yes, certainly ; but we shall soon know what his real feeling is ; we shall also learn the cause of it ; for Charles is too sincere a person to conceal from such friends as we are, anything that so seriously affects him.”

“ Whatever may be the cause, it has disappointed my fondest hope. You know with what pleasure I have looked forward to his return. I expected to find in him a friend, to counsel and help me to lighten the load of papa’s affliction.”

“ I trust your disappointment will be but short. Charles can have no wish but yours, and he must be earnest to help you.”

“ On the contrary, he fills me with new alarm. I dread to see him in papa’s presence. If papa should observe his strange behaviour, I tremble at the consequence.”

“ I will take an early opportunity of seeing him. I am sure he will not conceal

from me the true nature of the feeling, whatever it may be, which influences him."

This conversation was interrupted by a gentle tap at the door. Mrs. Grey's "come in" was answered by the entrance of Charles himself. As soon as she saw him, Matilda started to her feet, and, without speaking, hurried out of the room.

"Why does she leave us?" said he, much concerned at her avoidance of him.

"You have given her pain; she thinks you did not respond to my brother's kind welcome."

"I did not mean,—I was not aware that I showed any coldness to Lord Ashford."

"But you felt it, my dear Charles, and, therefore, showed it."

"Felt it!—How?"

"You are not frank with me, Charles. Something has happened to give you pain. I am sure you must be labouring under some strange mistake. My brother's affection for

you is as true as for his own child, and he has never failed to give you proof of it."

"I know the weight of my obligation to him, and I am oppressed by it."

"Weight of obligation!—Oppressed by the burthen!—These are not the terms by which affection expresses its sense of kindness."

"Yet I have that sense in a painful degree."

"But the sense of kindnesses shown us by those we love is pleasurable, not painful: it is painful only from those whom we dislike: am I then to think you have ceased to love your benefactor?"

Charles was silent, and a melancholy, almost painful expression, passed over his countenance.

"It is most unhappy that this feeling should have come into your heart at a time like the present, when the intensity of Lord



Ashford's suffering is giving us all the utmost anxiety."

"Yes, I know his loss. I also know too well that he has cause to suffer."

"Her kindness, her sweetness to you, make you feel her loss deeply; and it is quite natural," continued Mrs. Grey, observing searchingly the effect of her words upon Charles; "now she is gone, that you should grieve that she was not happy."

"I cannot bear to think of it, dear mother; do not let us speak of it."

"But I wish you to endeavour to sooth the suffering her loss has occasioned; you might do much. Dearest Matilda looks to you for help; and I know, dear Charles—I cannot mistake the natural impulse of your heart—it must prompt you to second her to the utmost of your power."

Charles was again silent, and Mrs. Grey gazed with astonishment and dismay at the gloomy expression of his countenance.

When he broke silence he said, hurriedly, "I fear I can do nothing in this matter; but I will try—it is right, it is a duty that I should try."

"What is your difficulty?" said Mrs. Grey, in a grave, almost solemn manner; "tell me, Charles, what this can mean?"

"Do not ask me, mother; I cannot tell you."

"Is it right that you should conceal from me what so greatly affects you?"

"It is right."

"For what reason can it be right?"

"I cannot explain; I am forbidden; it would lead to mischief. I have a task assigned me; I have undertaken it. I will do it. Dearest mother, give me your trust—give me your help. Trust me; I have a purpose, a duty, a sacred one; help me by not questioning me, and by lessening in every way you can the difficulties I may have to encounter in this family."

## CHAPTER IX.

“Against the threats  
Of malice or of sorcery, or that power  
Which erring men call Chance, this I hold firm.  
Virtue may be assailed, but never hurt,  
Surprised by unjust force, but not enthralled ;  
Yea, even that which mischief meant most harm  
Shall in the happy trial prove most glory.”

MILTON.

CHARLES left his mother's room for his own, with a hurried step. Had the walls of the room been conscious, they would not have recognised him as their old inhabitant. The merry song and the happy face were exchanged for sighs ; sometimes even audible murmurs escaped him, and late into the night his restless feet wandered up and

down in the apartment. When at last he retired to bed, he could not sleep ; and it was not till he had passed several hours in reading, that he fell into a disturbed and unrefreshing slumber.

The following morning the family had assembled at breakfast some time before he made his appearance in the room, Lord Ashford, contrary to his habit, having joined the party in honour of the occasion of his return amongst them. The coldness apparent in his manner on the preceding evening, had now increased to a gloomy expression ; but still Lord Ashford did not appear to observe it, and his behaviour to the young man was as cordial as on the night before.

“ I shall leave you with the ladies,” he said, as he rose from the breakfast-table. “ It would be unfair of me to run away with you so soon. You would be very angry with me if I were to do so, Matilda ? ”

Matilda made no answer.

“Shall I tell Charles how many hours you stood at the window watching for him?”

Matilda remained silent.

“Shall I describe to him how you compelled me to leave my writing; how you flew down stairs when the carriage stopped at the door?”

In a moment Charles was transformed to his former self; his coldness and restraint were gone. He looked up with his eyes sparkling with animation to the companion of his boyhood and youth, and holding out his hand, he said, “Dear Matilda,” in a voice like the old loved one.

The sound brought the colour into Matilda’s cheek, and she looked at him with an earnest and searching expression.

“Give him your hand, my child,” said Lord Ashford, gravely and with emotion.

She half rose to obey, when her eyes meeting those of Charles, she turned abruptly away, exclaiming, “Never—no, never

more;" but the words were scarcely audible, and she threw herself into her father's arms, where she remained long, sobbing violently.

"She has suffered much, Charles," said Lord Ashford; "but you must comfort her." Charles seemed really to wish to comfort her. He approached her gently, and said, in a voice of deep feeling, "Time and circumstances, which change others, let them not change us, dear Matilda; let us be to each other what we once were."

Matilda turned her large penetrating eyes full upon him; her lips did not move, but her eyes said, "You know this cannot be."

Articulate words were not needed; Charles understood her meaning; he felt its truth; and stood silent, almost abashed.

Some moments of awkward and painful silence followed, and the position of no one was improved by Charles's attempt to get rid of this tone of emotion by assuming one of indifference; for it seemed as if he

thought he could bring into this room, and confuse therewith the perceptions of the persons present, an atmosphere from the Continent. Mrs. Grey could scarcely believe it was Charles who spoke, when she heard him say, in a cheerful voice, "I have commissions to perform for some friends, which do not admit of delay; so, with your good leave, I will say Farewell till dinner time."

Ellinor, however, who appeared to think present friends ought no more to be neglected than absent ones, exclaimed loudly against his leaving them; and when she found that he was bent upon going, and that she could obtain from him no explanation of what his commissions were, or to what part of London they would lead him, she proposed that they should all go; and that they could take him where he wished in the carriage. This could not be; because he was going to ride on horseback. In that case, she herself wished to ride on horseback with him. But

it was unfortunate that he could not have the pleasure of her company this morning, as he did not know how long he might be detained, and he could not keep her waiting.

“I see very well,” cried she at last, pettishly, “that you wish to be without any of us;” and she sat down angrily to her book again.

Charles withdrew; but as Ellinor had not yet exhausted her efforts to get possession of him, she followed him up stairs, determined still to try what perseverance might effect. She knocked at his dressing-room door, and scarcely waiting for an answer, entered the apartment. There she found him sitting before his writing-table, on which, among books, papers, and sundry *et ceteras*, scattered in a little confusion, she observed an open travelling-desk which he seemed to be unpacking. With a sisterly familiarity, she carelessly turned over several of the things



that lay strewn on the table, and opened and glanced through some books. As she was proceeding in these operations, which had a good deal more of serious inquiry in them than they seemed to have, her quick eye perceived that Charles pushed aside certain papers near him in such a manner as to endeavour to cover something. It was unskilfully done, and was, besides, too late, for she plainly saw the object sought to be concealed ; it was certainly a bracelet.

She was now satisfied that there was some real and most likely personal cause for Charles's strange behaviour ; and further, she was resolved to know more.

“ Dear Charles,” she said, “ do not attempt to hide from me any thing so beautiful. What a lovely bracelet ! Who is it intended for ?”

“ It is not mine ; will you have the goodness to put it down ?”

Hands and eyes were busy in examining

it all over, and neither were in the least inclined to obey the request to put it down.

“Why,” she exclaimed, as she espied a jewel-case, which had been partly covered by the papers, but which her active fingers soon brought into full relief—“why, this case has poor Lady Ashford’s name on it, and was hers. I remember it perfectly.”

“It was hers,” said Charles, gravely.

“Well, I know it was hers ; but how did you get it, and what are you going to do with it ?”

“Good bye, Ellinor ;” and Charles hastily sweeping papers, bracelet, and all the other articles on the table into the desk, retreated with it into his bed-room, and Ellinor was left to look over French and Italian books at her leisure.

Charles was soon on horseback, riding, according to a direction at which he often looked, as if uncertain of finding the place

to which it was guiding him. At last, after many inquiries, he stopped his horse at a little gate.

“Does Mrs. Merton live here?”

“Yes.”

“Will you give this card, and say that I beg to see her for a few moments?”

Charles was shown into the little drawing-room ; his cheek was flushed, and he was in a state of very disagreeable agitation.

When Clara entered, his embarrassment increased. He was pledged to make a communication of a solemn nature, involving, as he believed, a terrible reproach to a woman ; but the impression produced upon him by the appearance of the woman who now stood before him, was that of a being so gentle, so refined, so suggestive of the living and breathing realization, in expression at least, of that ideal form and face, which the masters of their art have chosen as the medium of conveying their conception of

womanly purity and sweetness, that he felt assured she could not be the woman of whom he was in search. If this were really she, there must be some strange misunderstanding. Such were the thoughts that passed through his mind ; but audibly he said :—  
“ Perhaps, indeed, I believe, I am mistaken, madam.”

“ May I ask the occasion which has brought you here ?” said Clara, very gravely.

“ I scarcely know—I am afraid—there would be no end to my regret if I should have fallen into an error.”

“ You have not then called on any matter of business ?”

“ Yes—but ——”

Charles hesitating, could not finish the sentence.

“ May I ask if it is anything connected with my profession,” continued Clara, beginning to be apprehensive of some new disturbance of her peace.

“Your profession ! You are an artist !  
Then I am not mistaken.”

Here he was again silent, and remained so. Clara, now herself painfully embarrassed, looked earnestly at the card which she still held in her hand, when a sudden light seemed to flash across her mind.

“Am I mistaken, Sir,” said she, with an agitated heart, but in a very quiet manner, “in supposing that you are connected with Lord Ashford’s family?”

“I am his <sup>son</sup> sister’s step-son,” replied Charles.

“And you have come to me ?” inquired Clara, the colour passing from her cheek.

“My object in coming to you, madam,” returned Charles, as with trembling hand he placed his hat on the table, “is to execute a commission entrusted to me by the late Lady Ashford.”

“I am prepared to hear it,” said Clara.

“I must ask your forgiveness for the pain

I may occasion you. I should feel the communication I have to make embarrassing if I were called upon to deliver it to any one ; but to speak it to *you*—” He was again silent. In a moment, however, he continued, “I see, I feel that I stand in the presence of one who has suffered deeply. I must be permitted to express my sincere feeling. I know that I am speaking to one to whom affliction was not necessary for the correction of a single thought or deed incompatible with innocence and rectitude. Of this I have an undoubting conviction. I know not, therefore, why, having this sincere belief, I should feel so much reluctance to pronounce the words which I have promised to deliver.”

“You may pronounce them, whatever they may be ; it may be necessary that I should know them.”

“I know not the link which has connected you. I am ignorant of the true meaning of the message I am to give you. I am forbidden to permit you to explain its

meaning, should you be desirous of doing so ; but I gave her my word a few hours before her death, that I would be the bearer of it, and I am here to fulfil my promise."

As he said these words, he encountered Clara's steady inquiring glance. It was a moment in which the soul, the inner and true being speaks in the countenance. Awestricken, though that before him was, it was without fear or self-reproach, and in his inmost heart he bowed himself down before those deep sacred eyes.

"I was with Lady Ashford," he resumed, "in her last illness. I am now speaking of the last day of her life ; she called me to her ; she said to me, that she could not die in peace until she had given you her forgiveness, and had made provision for sending that forgiveness to you. She added, and she expressly desired me to say to you, that the bitter hatred she had borne to you was the crime that had bowed her to the earth ;

that she had faithfully and to the end struggled to remove it; and that in the end she had succeeded; and she charged me to give you a full and free acquittal of that cruel wrong you had done her."

After saying these words, Charles remained standing in silence before Clara, who was no longer conscious of his presence. Her eyes were raised, her hands were clasped; a smile on her pallid lips suggested the idea of a seraph's bliss, and her whole attitude was that of one engaged in prayer—in the act of deep and profound thanksgiving for the communication of some signal blessing.

Charles did not move: it seemed as if he endeavoured even to breathe softer, lest he should disturb the sacred emotion he witnessed; and when, after a few moments, Clara returned to consciousness, he was still standing, observing her less with an expression of respect than of reverence.



He did not offer to go.

"I have yet," he said, "another commission to execute ; it is with Miss Merton. Will you permit me to see her ?"

"My daughter is ill," replied Clara, "and I am doubtful whether she can see you ; but I will consider ; I will see."

She was absent some time : at length she returned, and conducted him into an adjoining room, where Bertha lay on a sofa.

"I have explained to my child," she said, "from whom you are the bearer of a message ; she will hear you."

Charles was not conscious that when thus called upon to speak, his voice was not at his command. His lips would scarcely utter an audible sound. What he attempted to articulate were the two words "Forgive me," and his meaning seemed in some degree to be understood by his auditors, though both mother and daughter were silent.

At length, taking from his pocket a bracelet and turning to Bertha, he said, in a voice which there was no longer any difficulty in hearing,—“Lady Ashford imagined that you would remember this. She desired me to recall to your remembrance the day when you stood by her, looking with a child’s admiration at it. She asks you to accept of it now, as a gift from her to you ; and she expressed the hope that the sight of it might remind you of the suffering which she has endured, and that the consciousness of this might act . . .”

The concluding words were inaudible, for the voice was again gone ; but at length he said,—“I have performed my promise, and I now ask your forgiveness.”

Clara looked at him compassionately, and said to him in a gentle voice,—

“We have nothing to forgive. You have only acted in obedience to the request of another, who, when she asked you to per-

form this office, knew nothing of us. She thought she had much to forgive ; and had her opinion been true, the amount would have been boundless ; still believing it to be true, she gave that sum of pardon. Now she knows all—she has entered into her reward. You cannot wound us. We perfectly understand what her feelings must have been, and we appreciate yours.”

“Thank you,” said the young man, earnestly ; “but the longer I am with you, the more I see of you, the more difficult my task becomes.”

“Then,” said Bertha, gently, “that is a reason, if there were no other, why you should perform your mission at once.”

“I dare not.”

“Dare not!” repeated Bertha. “Are these words to be spoken with reference to the fulfilment of a solemn pledge ? Then,” continued she, smiling, “I will perform your duty for you ;” and as she spoke she rose

from the sofa, and placed the bracelet on her arm. "Lady Ashford," she said, "in requesting my acceptance of this bracelet, desired you to bid me take warning not to risk my own happiness or the happiness of another, by committing any vicious act. Was it not so?"

Charles covered his face with his hands.

"Lady Ashford did well: in this she has set us an example; it was a proof of her noble nature that she was enabled to turn her unhappiness to so generous a purpose."

The task was now done, and Charles seemed to look for his reward. "We have met for the first time," he said, "under very painful circumstances. I have been the cause of inflicting much suffering on those to whom I am quite sure I should have been the bearer of the deepest sympathy, had the truth been known. I cannot forget the occurrences of this day; the memory will

always be a painful one if I am not permitted to meet you again : it may, however, be a happy day for me, if you will grant me the privilege of seeing you under calmer circumstances."

The permission to repeat his visit was granted.

## CHAPTER X.

“To measure life, learn thou betimes, and know  
T’ward solid good what leads the nearest way,  
For other things mild heaven a time ordains.”

MILTON.

As he left the house, a lady came up the little garden gate ; but he turned his head away, for he was not disposed to look on any face at that moment.

That face was Ellinor’s.

“So,” cried she, “this is the mystery,

then, and he avoids me. I will get to the bottom of this."

But Charles neither saw nor heard her, and mounting his horse, rode away.

When Ellinor sought for admission at Mrs. Merton's door, Susan brought word that no one could see her, Miss Merton being too ill to receive visitors.

"She must suddenly have become worse, then," said Miss Grey. "Lately, she was certainly not too ill to be seen," continued she, standing at the open window and looking in.

There she saw mother and child clasped in each other's arms, Clara weeping passionately, and Bertha with a radiant face, consoling and encouraging her. On Bertha's arm, which surrounded her mother's neck, Miss Grey saw the bracelet.

Hitherto the strangeness of Charles's

behaviour had excited in Ellinor purely the feeling of curiosity; but now the more serious feeling of suspicion took possession of her mind, and she resolved to watch her brother. She was also extremely angry at having been repulsed, less, perhaps, that she considered the refusal to admit her an affront, than that she had lost an opportunity of making discoveries. She left the window in a state of mind predisposed to believe anything evil of *these people*.

When they met at dinner, she saw clearly that Charles had not recognized her as they passed in Clara's garden. She questioned him as to the part of London to which his commissions had taken him, and the sort of people they concerned. He at first quietly evaded her questions; but at last answered her with some degree of irritation, which confirmed her suspicions.



Lord Ashford seemed to be in no more haste than Charles himself to enter on the consideration of the plans which he had formed for the future career of the young man. The course of life which had been marked out for him was indeed well known to Charles, and the review which he now often took of the circumstances connected with the education and discipline through which it had been intimated he should pass, gave him a painful sense of what was expected of him, and of the disappointment that would be felt when it should become known that that expectation could not be realized. As his views of those great principles, which determine the part taken in public life, assumed a more definite shape, and became more and more distinctly opposed to those which it was Lord Ashford's purpose he should entertain and support, he

had derived consolation from the thought of the gentle and prudent counsel which he might receive from his mother, as to the time and mode in which he should make known his state of mind. He had also resolved to give his entire confidence in this matter to Matilda, on the soundness of whose judgment, young as she was, he could rely, whose frank and upright mind would strengthen his own purpose to deal sincerely with her father, and more than all, who best would teach him how to lessen the pain of this disclosure to that father, so dearly loved.

The assurance that these pure and gentle minds would give him their best help in the performance of that duty, which, sooner or later, must be fulfilled, had deprived it of the greater part of its pain. But all the comfort of this hope was taken from him

by his unexpected encounter with Lady Ashford, and the circumstances which his communication with her disclosed.

Having visited Greece, and spent several months in Rome, Charles had arrived at Florence, where it was his intention to remain some time previously to his return to Paris. Here, to his great surprise, he found Lady Ashford, and learned that she had been residing at Florence with her sister, Mrs. Dalton, several months. Entirely ignorant of Lord Ashford's domestic discomforts, he had been inexpressibly shocked at the condition in which he now found Lady Ashford. She was obviously ill in body; but he soon observed that she was much worse in mind. She had hitherto resolutely refused to receive any medical advice. But Charles, who felt it his duty to devote himself to her as a son, prevailed on her to

see an English physician, whose first visit disclosed to him that she was labouring under an incurable disease. Of this she had herself long been conscious; but she had concealed the knowledge of it from all around her, partly from the wish to avoid the useless parade and trouble of remedies, and partly from the weariness of life. It seemed certain that she could not live long, and the deep sympathy which Charles felt for her awakened in her heart a tenderness that gave her the first feeling, of a pleasurable kind she had experienced for many years.

When he begged permission to write to Lord Ashford to inform him of her condition, and to request his immediate attendance, she rejected the proposal with so much vehemence, not unmixed with horror, that he could not but see that there must

be some deep and terrible cause for such a state of feeling. He offered no further remonstrance; he gave no advice. He felt that the suffering which consumed her had its source in some private misfortune or wrong, and he respected the sorrow which sought to shroud itself from every eye but that of God.

He resolved not to quit Italy till her fate was decided. However, in his close and affectionate attendance on her, circumstances beyond the control of either, obscurely and conjecturally disclosed to him something of the nature of the secret. In the progress of her disorder accessions of fever, attended with delirium, occasionally came on, and at these times expressions escaped her lips; names were pronounced, and remonstrances urged, which indicated the kind of events that had

occurred, and the actors in them, and excited in Charles astonishment and horror.

Next to his distress at witnessing the frightful consequences to the sufferer, the most painful result on his mind was the complete loss of respect for Lord Ashford, whose part in these transactions, as far as this could be perceived or conjectured, seemed the more unnatural and dreadful on account of his overstrictness in morals. His imagination was excited by the vagueness of the circumstances shadowed forth in the dreadful suffering of which he was a witness, and by the absence of any alleviating circumstances which the knowledge of the whole truth would have afforded him.

To the last she never told her secret, and she never even made the slightest allusion to the subject; at least, she never knew that

she had done so, but she entrusted Charles with the solemn messages to Clara and Bertha, of which we have seen he was the bearer, confiding in his honour not to attempt to discover their true meaning. He made no mention to her of the scenes of which he had been an unwilling witness, because he thought it would occasion her unmixed and needless pain, to let her know how much had been revealed to him during her delirium. It was at this period, while he was devoting his whole time to the task of soothing her last hours, only a few days before her death, that Charles received from Lord Ashford a letter recalling him home, and informing him that the time was now come, when it was necessary that he should prepare for entering a public career, under his own auspices ; but the idea of meeting this man had now become so hateful to him,

that his first impulse was to break off at once, and for ever, all communication with him, and to work out his own course in life unaided and untrammelled. Reflection, however, suggested that, after all, he might be committing a cruel injustice against Lord Ashford; that his wife had never accused or reproached her husband, and that it is the nature of delirium to transpose and confound persons and events, and to view with aversion and horror the objects of the tenderest affection. Then he thought of the unfailing devotion of Constance to her brother, and the ardent and confiding love of Matilda for her father,—he asked himself whether he, who, in these tender relations, could inspire such strong affection, could be guilty, as a husband, of baseness and cruelty. The perplexity which these reflections produced in his mind, tended, upon the whole,



to soften his feelings of aversion ; but, as we have seen, his suspicion and dislike returned in their full force when, on his first return to England, the presence of Lord Ashford brought back to his imagination, with dreadful vividness, the cruel suffering and the premature death he had so lately witnessed.

## CHAPTER XI.

“Who can doubt that all spaces and ages are one vast field of exertion? Among the chief wonders and glories which the future world is to disclose to us will be the enlarged powers, relations, and influences of virtuous beings.”—CHANNING.

THE exquisite loveliness which he recognized in Clara, and the innocence and beauty of Bertha ; the purity, the unobtrusive but habitual and deep feeling of religion, which, on further intercourse with them, appeared to him to fill the hearts, and to imbue the feelings, views, and aspirations of both, strengthened Charles’s conviction, that there must have been some cruel mistake on

the part of Lady Ashford, the removal of which had been prevented by the reserve of her nature, confirmed and perpetuated by that of her husband. The interest inspired in him by Clara and Bertha, who appeared to him to be unlike any persons he had ever met with before, drew him frequently to their society, and gradually established between them a confiding and soothing intercourse. Soothing it was to him in every sense, for it lessened the painful feelings associated in his mind with the memory of the last hours of Lady Ashford, and it diminished the intensity of his suspicion and dislike to Lord Ashford, enabling him to see and converse with him with much less embarrassment, than had been practicable on his first return to England.

Charles had been introduced by Clara and Bertha to their friends Leonora and Dr.

Weston, the former having recently again returned to England from the Continent, and the latter having become reconciled to the addition of a stranger to their society, by Charles's unpretending frankness, and his easy and polished manner, which a short intercourse showed, sprang in him from a refinement that was deeper than manner, and had its source in the mind and heart. By degrees his face was recognized in the circle as a familiar and cherished one, and the tone of his voice, though so new to them, was felt to mingle in harmony with those which had partly created, and were inseparably associated with the dearest pleasures of the best years of life.

One evening, when Charles entered the room in which the friends were accustomed to assemble, that room, which always suggested to his mind the word "Peace," as if

no storm or agitation could enter it, he found Clara drawing; Bertha was sitting before the piano, and there was music on the desk, and Dr. Weston and Leonora were standing near her, as if they were still listening with delighted emotion to sounds that had passed away. Charles took his seat close to Clara, and asked if the music might be resumed?

There was a bright expression of happiness in Bertha's countenance, and she immediately sang in the wild ecstatic manner peculiar to her, like one inspired, the following words from the ode on "The morning of the Nativity," to music which she had herself composed:—

"Yes. Truth and Justice then  
Will down return to men,  
Orb'd in a rainbow; and like glories wearing,  
Mercy will sit between  
Throned in celestial sheen,

With radiant feet the tissued clouds down  
steering,  
And Heaven as at some festival  
Will open wide the gates of her high palace  
hall."

The friends listened to her singing with feelings which raised them higher and nearer to God, and the reflex effect seemed to be to render them dearer to each other, as if they became still more closely united by the great bond of harmony. After the music ceased a silence of some moments followed, which Dr. Weston was the first to break.

"Now that the time is drawing near," said he, "I own I cannot think with calmness of your going abroad."

"Going abroad!—You are surely not going away?" exclaimed Charles.

"To take them away was the chief motive of my early return to England," replied

Leonora. "I wish to hasten our going while this fine weather lasts."

"And I had looked forward," said Charles, "to such great happiness in the winter,—to many and long evenings spent like this."

"We are to spend the winter on the Continent," answered Bertha, "and it is entirely Dr. Weston's fault."

Dr. Weston looked at her with an expression which brought tears to her eyes.

"Do not pay any attention to the innocent expression which he assumes," continued Bertha, turning to Charles; "it is entirely the consequence of his tyranny; in spite of all that can be said and done, he insists on it on my account, and it is the more vicious in him, because our leaving him will nearly break his heart."

"I shall be more stoical on the occasion than you imagine," replied Dr. Weston.

“ I do not believe in your stoicism in the least.”

“ Well, then, I shall have a better consolation than stoicism can give ; for it is my belief, that such a friendship as ours is beyond the accidents of chance and time, and that it will render us present to each other, at whatever distance from one another we may be removed.”

“ I agree with you entirely,” replied Clara, “ and I delight to think that it is so, not only with regard to our occasional and temporary separations here, but also with respect to that great and dreadful separation which must take place at death.”

“ If you are really convinced of this, and cherish the belief of it,” asked Dr. Weston, “ why do you call that separation at death great and dreadful?”

“ Because the pain of all separation is



great, but the pain of that separation which must last as long as our present state of existence, may be truly called dreadful.”

“ You believe, then,” said Leonora, with a look of profound satisfaction, “ that friends will know one another in a future state, and that there will be a re-union hereafter of those who loved one another here?”

“ That would seem to be a natural consequence of the restoration of consciousness,” replied Dr. Weston; “ for there can be no restoration of consciousness in the next stage of our being, unless the scenes of this life are presented to our memory; and surely, with the renewal of memory, that, which has been of the greatest consequence to us here, and which has had the greatest influence on our happiness,—the friendships we have formed,—cannot be forgotten;

there must, therefore, be a distinct remembrance of our friends."

"And we cannot have a distinct remembrance of our friends, without the renewal of our affection for them," observed Clara.

"That supposes," replied Leonora, "that we shall have the same feelings and affections in another state that we have at present."

"And why should we not?" asked Dr. Weston.

"The future state," replied Leonora, "is commonly conceived to be too exalted and glorious to admit of earthly passion and affection."

"Whatever is painful and sinful, that is, whatever is incompatible with true happiness in earthly passion and emotion, doubtless will have no place in that better state for which this is a preparation; but to

imagine that we shall be so wholly changed as to be without any particular passions and affections, is to suppose that we shall be new beings, and not the same beings in a state of progress."

"I think I see how it has happened," said Leonora; "we are none of us too happy here, nor do any of us realize our own conceptions of goodness and greatness. In imagining a future state, we have therefore determined to have a decided contrast; so we have excluded from our notion of that state everything which makes us in our own eyes weak, erring, and suffering."

"I have sometimes thought," resumed Dr. Weston, "that we undergo changes in our present state, greater than the changes that will mark our transition to the next; for example, the changes from the infant to the child, and from the child to the adult man,

are changes in all that constitutes conscious, intellectual, and enjoyable existence so great, that they could not probably take place suddenly in the same being."

"No more," said Clara, "than the bud could change suddenly into the mature fruit."

"Just so. As air, light, and heat are necessary to develop those processes in the plant which cause it first to put forth its leaves, and then its flowers, and last of all to mature its fruit, so the different conditions in which the human being is placed are necessary to work out those physical and intellectual changes, which transform the infant into the child, and the child into the man. These changes, vast as they are, when complete, are almost imperceptible in their progress. They are processes of development, and they merely mark the successive stages by which

the same being advances to the perfection of his nature. When all the development is accomplished which this state of being admits of, and man passes into an advanced state, where other and greater developments will go on, the progress, it is reasonable to suppose, will be, and indeed must necessarily be similarly gradual."

"You conceive, then, that angels are advanced men, as men are advanced children?" said Leonora.

"I do not give any opinion about angels. I speak of human beings gradually developing the proportions and powers of their nature, and thus advancing from lower to higher stages of existence. What I mean, is, that if we possess a real continuity of existence, and preserve all along a consciousness of the same existence, successively growing, the changes must be gradual. We have

here analogies to guide our conceptions ; without doubt all the instincts which have for their object the preservation of the present life, will cease with the exigencies of the present state of being ; but those higher parts of our nature, to the development of which, as far as they have yet advanced, these instincts have been subservient, our nobler faculties and affections, the desire of knowledge, the delight in beauty and goodness, benevolence, love, will not only not cease, but will grow with the perfection of our intellectual nature.”

“ That is a delightful thought which you suggest,” replied Leonora ; “ the continuity of our noble and generous affections ; the idea that commencing here, they will not cease with the present time, but will survive the grave, and that their direction and

objects now will determine in some measure their direction and objects for ever."

"I see nothing unreasonable in the supposition," answered Dr. Weston, with unusual animation, "that the connections and affections which commence here may produce an everlasting union of souls, and lay the foundation of sentiments and desires, the enlargement and gratification of which shall never come to an end."

"The everlasting union of souls," said Clara, "seems to me to be distinctly taught by the highest Authority. It appears to me to have been constantly present to the mind of the Great Founder of the Christian religion, who represents the re-union of his disciples with Himself as the great consummation of his mission, that they may be one with Him as He is one with God. It

is further said of these disciples, that they shall hereafter appear with Him in glory ; that He is now entered for them into heaven as their forerunner ; that He is there preparing a place for them, and that He will come again to take them to Himself, that where He is, there they may be also. The Scriptures also speak of a future state under the emblem of a community or city, and they further represent that city as containing separate mansions. I am always afraid," continued Clara, reverentially, "to attach a literal meaning to such language, which is no doubt used in a great measure in accommodation to our imperfect ideas ; but still it must have some meaning, and must be intended to suggest to us something distinct and real, and that can scarcely be less than the hope that the dwellers in those heavenly mansions will be those



who knew and loved one another on earth."

Charles, who had hitherto been a silent but attentive listener, was gazing earnestly on Clara as she spoke these words, and there was always something in the clear and soft tones of her voice which had an inexpressible charm for him. As if desirous to confirm her view, he said,—“It is not reasonable to suppose that beings of the same species, who have begun existence together under similar circumstances, and continued it to the end of life under the same heavenly discipline and government will hereafter be removed to different worlds, or scattered into different regions of the universe.”

“No,” replied Dr. Weston; “and I cannot but think that the very fact that they have commenced existence together, and have continued it to the end of life under the

same heavenly discipline and government, will give an inexpressible delight to the re-union of friends in that happier world."

"If this be so," said Leonora, "it must be a great pleasure then to look back upon our doubts and difficulties here. Here we are like children groping in the dark; there all will be light. I can conceive that there are passages in life on which it will be an unspeakable pleasure to look back hereafter; to trace with our beloved friends, whose happiness these events involved, their real effect upon our character and welfare; and to see then how mistaken were our views and fears. Perhaps in some far advanced state of our being we shall recall this very conversation, and receive a deeper joy from the blessed consciousness that the reality is so much purer and higher than our faculties can now conceive of."

“In all ages,” replied Charles, “thoughtful and noble minds have cherished the hope of meeting the great and good, who have preceded them and enjoying the delight of their society. ‘Who would not,’ says Socrates, ‘part with a great deal to purchase a meeting with Orpheus, Hesiod, and Homer? What pleasure will it give to live with Palamedes and others who suffered unjustly, and to compare my fate with theirs? What an unspeakable happiness will it be to converse, in another world, with Sisiphus and Ulysses, especially as those who inhabit that world shall die no more!’”

“Yes,” said Clara, “that will be the crowning joy, that they shall die no more; that there will be an end to the cruel separations which we now suffer. And then we shall be free from the littlenesses and weak-

nesses which now try and prove our friendships. No longer to wound or be wounded by unreasonable passions, hasty judgments, capricious tempers, or narrow opinions ; every wrong bias taken from the will, and every wrong feeling from the heart,—that will be the true realization of the realms of LIGHT and PEACE.”

“I remember a beautiful picture,\* which is given of this by a Christian philosopher,” replied Dr. Weston, “who, in describing the circumstances which will contribute to the happiness of a re-union of friends in another world, says,—‘Our hearts shall never more ache for their troubles, or feel anguish for their cares. They will be past all storms, cured of all follies, and eased of all pains. They

\* See Dissertations (Third) by Dr. Richard Price, in which will be found many of the thoughts expressed in this dialogue.

will appear in finished dignity and honour, after the education and discipline of this world;' and he draws this conclusion from the subject,—that if this life is only the introduction to a better, the feeble infancy of an existence that shall never end, it appears with imposing dignity; it has an infinitely important end and meaning; all its enjoyments receive an additional relish; the whole face of nature shines with additional beauty and lustre, and especially a new joy is communicated to all our present friendships."

"That must be so," cried Bertha, who had hitherto remained silent, but had listened to the conversation with wrapt attention; "and in that case the addition of a new friend is the addition of one who will share with us the joys of immortality." And she stretched her delicate, almost transparent,

hand to Charles. There was a brightness in her countenance, as if a beam had already come from those realms of light and peace which had just been talked of.

No one spoke.

“If,” continued she, in a voice scarcely audible, and as if communing with her own mind, “if our present existence is but the first step of an ascent in dignity and bliss which will never come to an end; if there be a state of future existence in which such blessedness is to be realized, then I feel with this Christian philosopher, that there is nothing worth a thought compared with making preparation for it.”

## CHAPTER XII.

“A thousand liveried angels lacky her,  
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,  
And in clear dream and solemn vision  
Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear,  
Till oft converse with heavenly habitants  
Begins to cast a beam on th’outward shape,  
The unpolluted temple of the mind,  
And turns it by degrees to the soul’s essence,  
Till all be made immortal !”

MILTON.

THE friends were making daily preparations for their departure, and the evening of Charles’s last visit to them had come.

It was with a feeling of profound melancholy that he directed his steps to the cottage. He went earlier than usual, and found Bertha alone.

He perceived in her countenance more decided traces of illness than he had before observed, and, for the first time, the thought occurred to him that he might never see her again.

Bertha perceived the painful emotion that passed through his mind, and divined its cause.

“You are anxious about me, dear friend,” she said, in a voice of tenderness. “You fear this may be the last time we shall meet on earth.”

Charles started, shocked at hearing his own thought so nakedly expressed.

“There is ground for your alarm,” she



said, calmly ; “ I know that my days are numbered, and that but few remain.”

“ No, no,” cried Charles, “ this cannot be true,—so young, so good, so beautiful!”

“ In the common view,” she continued, “ life has but just opened to me ; to myself, I seem already to have lived long.”

“ Long enough to show what a happiness life will be to you—what happiness is prepared, through you, for those who love you.”

“ Life has been to me, I cannot say the source of unmixed happiness, for my mother has not been happy ; but the love which has filled my heart for her, and for my other dear friends, has taught me to appreciate highly—perhaps too highly—the gift of existence.”

“ Existence, such as yours, spent in an

inner world, in which nothing but the beautiful and good have met the senses and occupied the thoughts, realizes my conception of that life which may be truly called a boon."

"But I have occasionally had glimpses of an outer world, from which I have recoiled with affright and terror."

"There is much in that outer world which may and will appal you."

"I do not think I could bear it. It has been long my prayer to the great Disposer of events that, if consistent with His will, He would spare me an acquaintance with it. I recognize His merciful answer to my prayer in the growing weakness of this feeble frame."

"But life, real life—that outer world from which you shrink—has its light as well as its shade; and the light is, too

slowly, indeed, but still sensibly, brightening, and prevailing progressively more and more over the shade."

"I do not doubt it, for it is God's world as much as His own heaven itself; and He rules equally over both. It is not for me to judge of the part assigned me. Whatever it be, I am willing to accept it as His appointment. But it may not be forbidden us humbly to indulge a wish; and mine is to live and die without the knowledge of anything beyond the beloved circle which has hitherto surrounded me."

"But to be removed from that circle! Oh! Bertha, dearest friend, you cannot bear that dreadful thought."

She placed her hand gently on his; the expression that beamed from her eyes had nothing in it of the ardour of enthusiasm; it was the calmness of settled

conviction, though radiant with a celestial hope.

“ You remember,” said she, “ our recent conversation. These were to me not words,—not a speculation, but a belief, a faith which I can and do realize. My conviction is, that friendship—that love is, in its own nature, imperishable, and will go on for ever working out new happiness, both for its subject and object. I do not believe that our Creator would have given us the capacity to feel and enjoy such blessedness, without having made provision for satisfying it. I cannot think that He would have implanted in our hearts such an inextinguishable desire for it, without having intended to gratify it. Time, therefore, under this view, my view, is as nothing. We bid our friends adieu at night ; we sleep,—in the

morning we rejoin them, refreshed, renewed—an immortal course before us.”

“ But those who do not sleep during that dreadful night ; in the interval that elapses before sleep falls on them, what blackness of darkness for them !”

“ Ah,—yes,—but my wish is not really so selfish as at first it may seem to you. My mother will soon join me. Dr. Weston well knows what must happen in a short time, and is preparing himself for the event : but oh, my Leonora ! my dearest Leonora ! she would indeed be without comfort, were it not that her belief and faith are as firm as mine ; and *she* also is capable of realizing that future in such a manner as to render the present comparatively unimportant.”

She saw in the incredulity and distress depicted in Charles’s countenance, that there

was one at least who was not capable of this realization.

“Do not mistake me, dear friend,” she continued.—“If it be the will of my heavenly Father that I should live, I repeat it to you, that I accept His gift with thankfulness. I am too insignificant to be of consequence to any one, excepting the dear friends, who form the only links that bind me to the earth. But the talent, the instrument is nothing, it is the uses we make of it:—

“And be it less or more, or soon or slow—  
It shall be still in strictest measure even  
To that same lot, however mean or high,  
Toward which Time leads me, and the will of  
Heaven.  
All is, if I have grace to use it so,  
As ever in my great Task-Master’s eye.”

“Into his hands I yield myself. If He, my great Task-Master, has assigned me my

work, whether of doing or suffering, I trust I shall be found ready ; but if there be nothing for me to do, then I hope I shall still not forget that

“ They also serve who only stand and wait.”

She paused, and Charles did not venture to break the silence. After a short time she continued, addressing Charles earnestly :—

“ We have our several parts allotted us. You have yours ; life opens to you with a brilliant prospect. It will be realized. I believe your course will be one of eminent usefulness. It would indeed add a charm to my life if I could be spared to witness it.”

“ Unhappily I am trammelled in the beginning. Instead of being fit for the race before me,—I feel bound hand and foot.”

“ Yes, I know something of your difficulties ; I have seen for some time how formidable they appear to you ; but you must not regard them as insuperable. They are trials placed in your path at the outset, to prove the temper and quality of your weapons.”

“ I am but poorly armed.”

“ You cannot tell until you have set yourself free, so that you can use the weapons, whatever they may be, which have been put into your hands. Be the pain to yourself and the cost to others what they may, you must shake off all impediments to freedom of action, before you enter on the great battle of life.”

“ I know I must. I have resolved to do so. I hesitate only as to the time and mode. Meantime you cannot comprehend the painful nature of my situation.”



“ I have gathered something of it from what has escaped you at different times. I imagine that now, when the moment is at hand, when you ought to be ready to make the proper return for a long debt of kindness, you find yourself unable to take the place in life that has been prepared for you.”

“ It is so, and my misfortune is, that the motives for my refusal to take the place provided for me cannot be appreciated by him to whom I owe this debt of kindness. They will appear to him so incomprehensible, that he will regard the course I am obliged to take as evidence only of caprice and ingratitude.”

“ But you believe that there is One greater than your earthly benefactor, who knows your motives, and will appreciate them? It is to Him before all others that

you owe fealty. It is your desire as well as mine to act :—

“ As ever in your Great Task-Master’s eye.”

“ I am afraid I have not, like you, always acted as if conscious of His presence ; but I can now, most sincerely, say that you make me feel that to be a solemn obligation, which I had before regarded rather as a point of honour, and that my duty becomes easy as my sense strengthens of the sacredness of its claim.”

“ Let me have the satisfaction of thinking, that I have done you the service of giving you a true friend for your counsellor. Dr. Weston is experienced in what is called the world, but he is uninfluenced by it. He has witnessed more of its errors and crimes, and of their dreadful consequences, than most men ; for he has sought out the victims

to mitigate their suffering, yet he retains in his own mind the purity and tenderness of a child. He is, too, a man of the clearest and soundest judgment, and I have reason to know, that he is specially qualified to give you trust-worthy counsel on this particular subject."

"Oh!" cried Charles, "he shall be my friend. I will trust him with my inmost thoughts, and I shall prize his friendship a thousand fold the more that I owe it to you."

Bertha was silent for a few moments, and then they talked calmly of her journey, and arranged the stages from which she should write. He described to her the various objects that he had himself seen, and that were most worthy of notice in the different places through which they were to pass, and she promised to write him an account

of the impressions made upon her own mind by the new scenes which she was about to witness.

When he was on the point of taking his leave of her, she became sensibly agitated. "There is one question," she said, "which I wish to ask you before you go, and you must answer me truly. Do you know the real meaning of the message which you brought us from Lady Ashford?"

Charles was entirely taken by surprise. This was the first allusion she had ever made to the subject. He did not immediately reply, but was evidently a good deal embarrassed.

"You do know," continued she, "do you not?"

"I once thought I knew," replied Charles, "for some words which escaped her seemed

to admit of only one interpretation ; but what I have seen now convinces me that I did not understand her."

"That is your sincere impression?" asked Bertha.

"I am satisfied," replied Charles, "that there has been some misunderstanding,—some delusion. I think it was on the part of Lady Ashford ; I believe she laboured under some great and fatal error which destroyed her happiness, and thereby her life. Still, however, there are circumstances which are inexplicable to me, and I can form no settled opinion on the subject."

"The mystery will, one day, be cleared up, and that perhaps soon," said Bertha, abstractedly, and fell into a state in which she seemed to be following out an exciting train of thought.

Suddenly she said abruptly, and with some degree of wildness in her manner, —“ You know Matilda, Lady Ashford’s daughter ?”

“ Perfectly.”

“ When time shall have cleared up what is now inexplicable to you, you will know what my mother has really been ; you will understand her noble and heavenly conduct. When that time comes, remember the request which I now make. Explain these things to Matilda, if you find that you can do so without giving her very much pain.”

“ Be assured that I will.”

“ Thank you, I am satisfied.”

After a little while she said, half-smiling,

“ I have left you in my will to Leonora and Dr. Weston ; they will take care of you, and you will be their friend. I will be with you if it be permitted. I will

watch over you, protect you, and bless you. Farewell, my brother, until we meet again."

And she leaned gently on his extended arm, and pressed her lips to his cheek.

Charles was deeply affected, and the resolution formed in his heart at that moment was, that no unworthy thought or action should ever sully with the blush of shame the cheek which those lips had touched.

## CHAPTER XIII.

“ Knowledge comes, but Wisdom lingers,  
And he bears a laden breast,  
Full of sad experience, moving towards  
The stillness of his rest.”

TENNYSON.

CHARLES had ordered his groom to bring his horse at a given hour. On leaving the house he rode straight into the country, continuing to ride, at a rapid pace, several hours, for he was in too excited a state



to return to Grosvenor Square. He kept away from home till he supposed the quiet family would have retired to rest for the night. He was told, however, on entering, that Lord Ashford, who had been out of town, had arrived at home early in the evening. He inquired if he had desired to see him; the servant replied, that he believed not; that his Lordship seemed indisposed, and had remained entirely in his own apartments; no one going to him there but Miss Ashford.

In the morning Lord Ashford breakfasted alone with Matilda; but shortly after breakfast she came to Charles and said that her father wished to see him in his study.

On entering the room Charles was shocked at the change which had taken place in the appearance of his uncle; his face was pale,

and full of suffering; he seemed also to be very ill; he received Charles kindly.

“ You have once or twice told me,” said he, “ that you wished to talk over our plans. I have been obliged to defer it. I shall now be glad to enter on the subject.”

Charles had often endeavoured to prepare himself for this conversation, and had even arranged the very words with which to begin what he had to say. But the circumstances under which he was now called upon to speak were entirely different from those which he had anticipated. He had been prepared to encounter the prosperous, the stern, the overbearing Lord Ashford, but he was wholly disarmed by the sight of the bowed, sorrow-stricken being whom he beheld there, leaning back in his arm-chair, his eye fixed on vacancy, and

his trembling hands passing unconsciously and hurriedly over the large forehead, now seamed with the lines of anxiety and care.

Charles was penetrated with compassion for him; his own affairs were, for the moment, forgotten; the pre-arranged sentences, by which he had intended to commence the long dreaded explanation, faded from his memory; thoughts and words were alike gone.

He at once abandoned the design of disclosing, on this occasion, the real state of his views and feelings. The selfish relief which he might thus bring to his own mind, would be purchased at the price of inflicting disappointment and suffering upon his generous benefactor, at a moment when he obviously needed solace and assistance. Once he saw pass over the pale face an expression which reminded him of the

divine Bertha, and the suggestion of her image brought with it the conviction that she would approve of his postponing, to a more fitting occasion, the performance of his painful task.

“ I grieve to see you so unwell,” said he, at last; “ will you give me the comfort of hoping that you have called me to engage me in some service?”

As Charles spoke, Lord Ashford lifted his head to listen to him, as if he had been unconscious that he was in the room, and had forgotten the occasion on which he had summoned him to his presence, and it was plain that he did not now comprehend what Charles had said to him.

“ It would give me the sincerest satisfaction,” resumed Charles, “ if I might dare to hope that I could be of the slightest assistance.”

“ Yes, my dear boy,” answered Lord Ashford, replying not to Charles’s words but to the train of his own thoughts,—“ I know it is entirely my own fault that it has been so long deferred; it was wrong, quite wrong, to delay it so long; it must have kept you in much anxiety, but tell me now, Charles, what you yourself desire.”

“ My only wish is to lessen the distress under which you are suffering, and if it is not presumptuous in me to hope——”

“ Distress! what do you mean, sir?” cried Lord Ashford, suddenly shaking off the appearance of feebleness and infirmity, and speaking with his usual sternness.

“ I cannot bear,” replied Charles, “ that you should occupy yourself with any thought about me, at a moment when you yourself are suffering, as it seems to me, from some illness.”

“I am not ill,” said Lord Ashford, angrily; “nor suffering either; at least, from nothing that has relation to any concern of yours. I sent for you, sir, to speak to you on matters relating to yourself, and with no desire to bring before me an eye to scrutinize my feelings and affairs.”

“It is very true,” replied Charles, “I have desired to have an opportunity of speaking with you on matters relating to myself; but now I respectfully but earnestly beg of you to defer this conversation for the present.”

“It has been already deferred too long,” answered Lord Ashford, “and I desire that there should be at once a clear understanding on the subject between us.”

“But I cannot speak to you sincerely and truly,” said Charles, in a tone of sadness, “without giving you pain, my Lord;

and Heaven knows that I would willingly sacrifice my dearest hopes in life, to be spared the necessity of causing you this infliction."

"I am accustomed to disappointment," replied Lord Ashford; "to opposition and antagonism, where I might naturally look for sympathy and co-operation: the pain you speak of, sir, will therefore have nothing in it of novelty."

"But from me," cried Charles, with a frank earnestness, "you ought to receive the deepest sympathy. I ought to be only a subject of gratulation to you; that was my hope, and would have been my pride."

"Then let it be so."

"You have given me a noble education; you have fixed your heart on realizing the expectations which such an education might reasonably and naturally justify."

“Yes, Charles, all this is true.”

“But I cannot realize those expectations.”

“Why not?”

“Because, on examining my heart and conscience, I find that my convictions on principles to which you justly attach the highest importance are at variance with yours. It is with the deepest sorrow I say it; I am unable to enter on the public career which I once ardently desired, and for which, with such munificence of means, you have so generously intended to prepare me.”

Lord Ashford listened to these words in profound silence, without an impatient expression or gesture; nor was any extraordinary emotion perceptible on his countenance. After the pause of a few moments, he replied, calmly,—“If this be so, you are



perfectly right to explain it to me. I now know the truth. It is well; let nothing further be said on the subject."

Charles's impulse was to throw himself at the feet of his benefactor, and to express his heart-felt thankfulness at this generous forbearance—a forbearance which appeared to him to afford the crowning proof of the true affection with which he had ever been regarded by him; but he was kept silent and motionless by an extraordinary change which he observed in his uncle. The expression of his countenance was that of deeper anguish than Charles had ever before witnessed on any human face, and he seemed to be struggling to speak without the power to command his words.

"Good God!" cried Charles, "what have I done?"

"I do not yet know," replied Lord Ash-

ford, solemnly; "but you must tell me; you must disclose to me the truth."

"I will conceal from you nothing."

"I understand—I—I—indeed I know—that you were with my wife, with Lady Ashford when she died. Why was I not informed of this by you?"

"Because I had Lady Ashford's express command not to mention her name to you until I should be questioned by you."

"Tell me the exact truth," continued Lord Ashford, trembling from head to foot. "You are aware that there was a cause of difference between Lady Ashford and myself. I wish to know whether she informed you of its nature, or of any circumstance in which it might possibly originate?"

"Never; she never even alluded to the subject; and I am convinced she was ear-

nestly desirous to keep me, as well as all others, entirely ignorant of the secret."

Lord Ashford became more composed. He sat silent, as if in reverie for some time, and then asked abruptly,—“Did Lady Ashford ever mention to you a person of the name of Merton?”

“She did: she bound me by a solemn promise to be the bearer of a message both to Mrs. and Miss Merton.”

“Have you fulfilled that promise?”

“I have.”

“I beg to know the nature of that message.”

“It was communicated to me in confidence, under circumstances of peculiar solemnity, and I am doubtful whether the obligation to secrecy does not extend even to your Lordship.”

“If she gave you no express command to withhold it from me, surely I may claim—”

“She certainly gave me no command with reference to you : perhaps it was her intention to leave me free in this respect. My own impression is, that, without breaking my trust to her, I may consider myself exonerated from the obligation to secrecy, as far as respects you, if you require me to give you an exact account of the facts.”

“Go on, sir, go on,” cried Lord Ashford, impatiently.

In brief and simple words, Charles immediately explained the communication with which he had been charged.

“During the recital, Lord Ashford sat with his face hidden by his hand, and Charles also placed himself at some distance, in such a position that he could

scarcely be seen, when Lord Ashford should move.

After he had finished the account of all that took place on his first visit to Mrs. Merton, Lord Ashford remained silent a long time ; but at last he said,—

“ You have seen these ladies since ? ”

“ I have.”

“ Often ? ”

“ Yes, frequently.”

“ Here is a letter which I wish you to read.”

He held out an open letter to the young man, which, to his extreme astonishment, he perceived, on reading the first words, to have been written by his sister, Ellinor Grey. It was as follows :—

“ My dear Uncle,

“ I dare not conceal from you, whose interest in both my brother Charles and myself

has always been so great, certain facts which have come to my knowledge. I trust that their importance will make you forgive the trouble I give you in reading this letter.

“I feel it my especial duty to make this communication, as I am fully aware of the noble prospects you have in view for my brother, and I should be wanting in duty to you, as well as in love to him, were I to allow him to throw them all away without, at least, an effort to save him.

“I grieve to tell you that my brother has become intimately acquainted with some people, whose characters, I believe, are well known to you, as I remember your undisguised displeasure when poor Lady Ashford went to the house where they formerly lived, in order to have her picture painted. I need hardly say the name is Merton. Of course it would be of little or no consequence to

my brother to become intimate with Mrs. Merton, but for this very important reason,—she has a daughter—who is now grown up, a beautiful and fascinating young woman—and both mother and daughter have not been wanting in efforts to entrap my brother's affections. I say nothing of Miss Merton's character, but she is, I know, a person of peculiar habits and opinions; a fact which, under any circumstances, would be no recommendation of this young lady to your lordship. But the trap she has laid for Charles is confirmation of the worst apprehensions respecting her.

“He has, to my own knowledge, brought some valuable presents for her, and she wears his gifts, and I have no doubt that if nothing is done to prevent it, their marriage will take place without delay.”

Charles read no further, but flung the

letter from him with an expression of impatience and disgust.

When he looked up, Lord Ashford's eyes were fixed upon him.

"Is this true, Charles?" he said.

"No," replied Charles. "There is not one word of truth in it, from beginning to end."

"And no colour for it?"

"That there may be. The truth is this. The circumstances under which I first visited these ladies are known to you. You will easily conceive that my impressions about them were not favourable; but it required no intimate acquaintance with Mrs. Merton to cease to harbour one injurious thought of her. It is impossible to be in her presence without being impressed by her gentleness and innocence. She appears to me to be the very image of purity and dignity."



“That is your opinion,” said Lord Ashford, with an assumed coldness ; “but you do not tell me the circumstances on which your sister’s suspicions may possibly have been founded.”

“She has probably learned that I have sometimes visited these ladies, and her own imagination has created all the rest. She knows absolutely nothing of Mrs. Merton or her daughter, and nothing can be more base or calumnious than her suggestions in relation to both. With regard to Miss Merton, however, I may add, that she is a person towards whom I apprehend few men would presume to entertain any views of love or marriage, and certain it is that I know no man living who could call out, in her, feelings having any relation to such subjects.”

“Have you anything further you desire to say ?”

“One word more. There is a barrier between Miss Merton and marriage, which no human power can overcome. She is dying.”

A shudder passed through Lord Ashford's frame, but he did not speak. He leaned back in his chair, and fell into his former state of reverie.

Charles sat down in silence by his side, watching him anxiously. After a time, Lord Ashford rose up suddenly, like a person in a dream. At length he cried out, “Charles, are you there?”

“I am near you—where I hope you will still permit me to be.”

“Come to me,” exclaimed Lord Ashford, extending both his arms to him, and folding him to his bosom ; then he again sunk back into his chair, almost insensible.

Shocked and terrified, the young man felt the keenest self-reproach at having inflicted

on his kindest and best friend (as at that moment he felt him to be) such dreadful suffering. He knelt down, leaning his head on Lord Ashford's hands, waiting till he should again speak to him ; but the words of his benefactor brought to him no consolation.

“ It has happened to me, through life,” said Lord Ashford, “ that the love I have felt for others has met with no return,—has brought nothing but suffering to its objects and to myself. This is a new,—a painful instance of it.”

He paused, and Charles could offer no suggestion calculated to solace or sooth.

“ It is true,” resumed Lord Ashford, “ that I can trace an alloy of selfishness in my love for others which, perhaps, deserves the bitter fruit it has yielded ; but, with respect to you, Charles, I have felt

nothing which I shall not be able to present with satisfaction, on the great day of account. Yet the plan on which I had set my heart for you has also failed. Oh, Charles, God has given me no son. Often have I blessed the wisdom and goodness which I thought had so ordered it, that by the union of the son of my adoption with my own child, I should become the father of two children, whose mutual happiness would be secured by this double, this blessed bond."

"Heaven may still have happiness in store for us all," cried Charles, inexpressibly moved by these words. "I will devote myself to you,—to Matilda,—to the latest hour of my existence!"

"It cannot be," replied Lord Ashford, in a tone of despair,—“it will not be. I can judge of the future by the past. Matilda

alone is left to me—my precious child! and, perhaps, there is one more calamity in reserve for me,—the loss of her.”

“A merciful God will save you from such utter desolation,” said Charles. “She will never forsake you,—will never disappoint you; and I—I will be to you another child. We will work together for your happiness. We will place our happiness in yours. I have been to blame. I have not united with her, as she expected, in the object to which she is devoted; but this, at least, is an object in which our sympathy may be and ought to be perfect. Both you and she will respect me—will not withdraw your affection from me, though our views in some respects may differ.”

“Our wishes are sometimes wrought out,” said Lord Ashford, abstractedly, as

if a ray of hope had suddenly gleamed through his gloomy future, "in modes which we did not expect. God grant it may be so!"

"I could not have respected myself," continued Charles, "nor should I have deserved your esteem, if I had concealed from you my convictions with reference to principles, which, if I engage at all in public life, must determine my course. But I do not see why conscientious differences of opinion should alienate affection."

"We must, undoubtedly, follow our own convictions," replied Lord Ashford. "I cannot alter yours; but I respect conscience. You have proved that you know when this sacred monitor speaks, and that you obey his voice. Continue to do so. Let no consideration ever turn you aside

from that course in which you have thus honourably begun. Let the impression produced upon me by your present conduct be a lesson to you."

## CHAPTER XIV.

“So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,  
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,  
And tricks his beams, and with new spangled  
ore  
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky.”  
MILTON.

CHARLES'S first object, after this interview, was to seek Matilda. He found her with Mrs. Grey, her constant companion, whose watchful care over her was, as we have seen, more than maternal, and the



gentleness of whose nature exercised a most beneficial influence in moderating and directing the ardent feelings which were now beginning to develop themselves in her.

The entrance of Charles interrupted one of the cheerful conversations which they frequently enjoyed together, and which formed the greatest happiness of Matilda's present life. It was the custom of Constance to read a good deal to Matilda from the best authors, and to make the passages and incidents which, from day to day, engaged their attention, the occasion for communicating to the mind of the young girl the results of the knowledge which she had herself acquired through an unusually studious life. Information thus conveyed, the gold sifted from the dross,—the beautiful, the interesting, the instructive sepa-

rated from the trivial and the useless, presented through the medium of a refined taste and a matured judgment, by the voice, and that voice dear to the listener,—is always irresistibly charming to the pupil, however enervating and injurious to the mind when allowed to supersede the rough discipline of study.

Both teacher and pupil immediately perceived something unusual in Charles's manner. He at once spoke to them on the subject of which his heart was full.

“I am come to you,” said he, addressing Matilda, “to express my deep regret that I have worked so little with you in the great object of your life, and which ought to be mine quite as much as yours.”

Matilda looked at him earnestly and inquiringly, but remained silent.

“I beg of you,” continued he, “to take

me back to your affection, to your confidence, and let me unite with you in devotedness to him to whom we owe all that is dear to us."

The colour flushed her cheek, and she replied,

"Charles, you speak earnestly, I do not doubt, sincerely, and I accept your offer in the spirit of frankness with which it is made."

"But you wonder why I should ever have alienated myself from this work of love—of duty. You have a right to be satisfied on this point."

"I seek no satisfaction of the kind, and nothing will give satisfaction to me but one thing, and that I must have."

"You shall, whatever it be, if I can give it."

"I will allow no one to approach my

father with me, professing to share in my happiness and aims, who does not love him. Charles, your treatment of my father of late has not been that of love."

"It has not, I confess it. My consciousness of the justness of your reproach would be more than I could bear, if I did not hope that you would forgive me, and allow me the opportunity of endeavouring to repair my error, which was occasioned by a dreadful mistake."

"Then you love him?"

"As a devoted son should love a father."

"That is enough. I do not wish to know the circumstances that have misled you. It is sufficient that you disavow them, and that you tell me that you love him."

"I have just left him. I have witnessed emotion—affection which has penetrated my

heart with the profoundest admiration and love."

"Dearest, dearest Charles," she cried, giving him her hand with cordial affection, "you are again my brother."

These few words appeared to have made Matilda a new being. Her affection for Charles, which had lately been pent up in her own bosom, without the possibility of expression, but which was always really there in undiminished force, was now permitted to flow in its accustomed channel, and to manifest itself in its accustomed mode.

The emotion that Charles had undergone, and the happiness that now filled his heart from the renewal of that charm which the affection of Matilda imparted to his life, had driven Ellinor from his thoughts. It was

not till an hour had passed away in a delightful conversation, that a passing remark of Mrs. Grey's recalled her to him.

"Has not Ellinor returned yet?" said she. "Her maid told me that her drive was only to be a few miles out of town to make a call."

A fear shot through Charles's brain that this call might be to Mrs. Merton's, and he dreaded some impertinence on her part towards Bertha. After a few minutes of silence, he therefore rose, and saying he was obliged to go out, ordered his horse, and rode there himself.

As he approached within sight of the little gate, he perceived that his suspicion was correct. His sister had just re-entered the carriage, and was on the point of driving away. Calling to the coachman to stop, he flung the bridle of his horse to his servant,

opened the carriage door and seated himself by her side.

She looked rather uncomfortable, but said with perfect calmness : " I have just left your friends. You had better not go in, for Miss Merton, I am sorry to say, is ill."

" What ! is she worse ?"

" Very much worse ; she has been seized with a chest complaint. Her physician fears she has ruptured a blood-vessel."

" This is not, I trust, in consequence of anything which you have done or said."

" Indeed, Charles, I cannot possibly be accountable for such accidents. Be so good as to order the carriage home."

" The demon of mischief has taken possession of you," cried Charles, as he sprung from the carriage and hastened up the little garden walk, where he was met by Dr. Weston.

“Hush!” said the physician, “make no sound as you enter ; all is nearly over.”

“It is, then, too true,” said Charles.

“You will still see her before she leaves us. The memory of the expression of that face will be your solace hereafter.”

Charles entered the room silently. She had been addressing a few words to her mother and Leonora, but she spoke with difficulty, and in a whisper. Her face was pale, but the complexion was of wonderful brightness and transparency. Her delicate features, always of extraordinary regularity, now looked as if exquisitely chiselled ; they expressed the same peacefulness and the same singular beauty that sometimes settles down on the features in the first hours after the warmth of life has finally passed away ; but at the present moment there beamed forth from these a heavenly radiance.



“My prayer is answered,” she said, “I am free.”

After a short pause she again spoke.

“My mother,” she resumed, “this is not separation, it is union. You will join me.—*He* will find us.—There we shall be to one another what here we could not be.

“Oh, my Leonora, I owe this heavenly peacefulness in part to you. It will comfort you to think that you have helped to prepare me for such blessedness.”

Then seeing Charles, she held out her hand to him and said : “I am called to my trial sooner than we expected. My hope, my faith, are unchanged. Love dies not when we fall into this sleep. The sleep short—the awaking an everlasting life of love.”

Her words ceased ; she seemed no longer to see distinctly,—no sound apparently reached her ear,—her eye became more dim,

—the radiance of her countenance faded,—  
a thicker, darker hue, spread over that  
bright transparent skin,—it was the shadow  
of the wing of the angel of death that passed  
over her.

## CHAPTER XV.

“And the armed fly that robs and stings  
Hath work to do for man and God.”

EBENEZER ELLIOT.

THERE is a shadow even darker than that of death. It was about to pass over the Ashford family.

One morning shortly after these events, Constance was startled from her sleep by an extraordinary sound of sobs from Matilda,

who sat by her bedside in an agony of grief.

To her aunt's repeated entreaties to explain the cause of her distress, she answered only by wringing her hands violently, and sometimes stamping her foot with rage.

"Matilda, my child," continued Constance, "tell me what has happened to you. I cannot bear to see you thus."

The young girl, struggling to command her passionate grief, at length succeeded sufficiently to enable her to sob out—"Oh! indeed, indeed I have endeavoured to command myself, but I am not able,—I cannot endure it."

"But what then has happened?" said Mrs. Grey, in increasing alarm.

"I will tell you if you will not let it make you ill."

“ You will certainly make me ill if you do not tell me the truth at once.”

“ See,—see,” cried Matilda,” read what they say in this newspaper,—that the mob at Ashford have dared to make an attack upon him ; that they have hooted at him, and have pelted him with stones.”

“ Is that all ?” replied Mrs. Grey.

“ That all !” cried Matilda, her eyes gleaming with pent up fury through the tears that were streaming down her flushed face,—“ all ?”

“ Yes, my darling. This no doubt, is sufficiently painful and odious, but it is not of the importance you suppose. All this has happened, has it not, at the election ?”

“ It has.”

“ You do not know, that on these occasions all kinds of grossness and brutality

frequently take place. The people are excited by designing men on both sides, and being quite ignorant of the merits or demerits of the several parties, are easily led away to commit all sorts of excesses and follies. But your father is in no danger, and will only laugh at it when all is over."

"But, Aunt Constance, you do not know the worst. When you read this you will understand why I am alarmed. Look at this passage and at this," she cried, pointing to the paragraphs.

Mrs. Grey took the newspaper and was beginning to read the account, when Matilda cried "Stop, stop, I will not be present when you read those dreadful words," and she rushed from the room.

The paragraph was to the effect, that an abusive attack had been made on Lord Ashford's private character by an opponent

on the hustings, with a view to weaken his Lordship's political influence in favour of the candidate brought forward by him in Charles's place ; then, when on Lord Ashford's side, a peremptory demand was made of the speaker to give his authority for this slander, he had distinctly named Sir Frederick Buckton ; that Lord Ashford had been excited to such a pitch of fury, that he attempted to strike the slanderer, and that after being forcibly withheld by the by-standers, he had become so ill, that it was necessary to remove him from the platform ; but that he soon recovered sufficiently to be able to leave the scene of the election and to return in his carriage to Ashford Castle.

In another part of the paper a different account was given under the heading,—  
“ SCENE AT A COUNTRY ELECTION.” In

this account initial letters only were used, no names being given at full length. According to this paragraph,—“ There was a rumour, bearing some show of truth, that Lord A——d’s first wife, by an early and imprudent marriage, had been deserted by him, to enable him to contract an alliance with the late lamented Lady A——d, daughter to the late, and sister to the present Lord S——n, and heiress to an immense property, inherited from her mother, Lady S——n. There was even reason to believe that the unfortunate Lady,—the real Lady A——d,—was still alive, and supported in a humble condition of life by Lord A——d, on the express stipulation that she should never bring forward her own claims, or those of her daughter by Lord A——d. But this daughter having lately died, and the family commonly known as



Lord A——d's (consisting of one child, a daughter by Miss S——n,) being illegitimate, the heir-at-law to the estate and titles, the Hon. Mr. W——by, was about to bring forward an action at law to prove the first marriage, and consequently to set aside the validity of the second, and thereby the title of Miss A——d as heiress at her father's death."

Mrs. Grey had scarcely finished reading the paragraph before Matilda returned to the room dressed as for a journey.

"Where are you going, my dearest girl?" inquired Constance.

"To my father," replied Matilda. "I must see him. Will the carriage never be ready?" and she rang the bell impatiently, urging the maid who answered it to hurry the servants.

"I grieve to leave you, my dearest Aunt

Constance, who are still so ill," resumed Matilda; "but you would be worse if we left him alone. Oh that you could go with me! but that is impossible."

"Charles will accompany you, my child."

"Charles is not in the house. I cannot delay my journey a single hour. He will follow me. He will be a comfort and help to me after I have once seen my father, but before that, it is better that I should be alone."

Mrs. Grey made what hurried preparations were practicable for the journey, and gave her darling girl to the care of a trusty maid servant, who was to accompany her.

Constance then drew Matilda to her side, and said to her,

"This account, my love, has no truth in it; be assured it is a gross calumny."

"I know it is," replied Matilda; "but

the effect on him will not be the less dreadful.”

“The first shock appears to have been truly alarming,” observed Constance.

“Can you wonder at it? Can you imagine how he can have lived through such a moment—he who is so good, so true, so pure? Oh, my aunt, I dread to see him. And he was so ill before he went down to that hateful place.”

“You will be a comfort to him, my blessed child. You can sooth and help him more than any other human being. Charles will join you immediately, and I also will come to you in a day or two if it be possible.”

A long journey to one in her anxious and impatient state was a great trial. It was not possible to reach Ashford Castle, though she travelled all night, and with the utmost

speed, till the following evening. In the meantime the thoughts which passed through her mind were often of the most distressing nature. Every word that had fallen from her father during those dreadful hours that followed the account of the news of her mother's death, occurred to her memory. Some of those words seemed now to have a portentous meaning. What if this story should be true? What if it were the consciousness of this frightful crime that had so bowed him down to the earth? What if such dishonour had really stained that sacred name? But it was not possible! Men might be guilty of blasphemy against each other as well as against God. To harbour such a thought of one so distinguished for rectitude, so singular, so unapproached for his scrupulous and rigid adherence in thought, word, and deed to the dictates of

honour, would be the vilest profanation ! But how then can he have fallen under the suspicion of such a deed ! What false, what misleading facts can have become known to his enemies that they should have the power—that they should dare to make such an accusation against him ! Facts false, misleading ! Can there be such things ! Can there be appearances justifying in the remotest degree such a suspicion without having a foundation in some horrible truth ? Well—and if this, the worst thing which the imagination can picture, should be realized ! What then ? He is still my father. He is still the object of my devoted love. My place is still at his side, to suffer with him and for him, and if I cannot save him or help him, to die with him !”

When the travellers arrived within a few miles of their journey’s end, Matilda drew up

the blinds of the carriage, that she might not be recognized in the neighbourhood where she was well known, and as she approached the castle, she had reason to be satisfied that she had taken this precaution, as many post-chaises and other carriages continually passed them.

She desired the man-servant, who accompanied them, to take the carriage through the park by a back entrance, and to stop when they reached a particular spot on the grounds, near the stables. Here she and her maid alighted, walking on by a secluded path through the gardens to the house, having first sent on the man with a message to Travers, who, as usual, had accompanied Lord Ashford to the country.

Her note requested Travers to come to her through her own sitting-room to a little green-house attached to it. Meantime she

had given the servant strict orders to enjoin secrecy on all the other servants respecting her arrival at the castle.

In about a quarter of an hour, the glass door which separated the sitting-room from the green-house was cautiously opened, and the stiff, formal figure of Travers issued from it. He went directly to the spot where Matilda was standing in the shade of the twilight.

“Is my father very ill, Travers?” she asked, trembling with apprehension.

“No, my dear young lady, not now ; the danger is over ; do not be alarmed.”

The faltering manner and sorrowful tone in which this was said deprived the words of the consolation they were intended to convey.

“Is he alone?”

“Yes, he is quite alone.”

“And where?”

“My Lord has been sitting in his own study all day. He has been engaged in placing labels, with your name on them, on the little cabinets there, which contain pictures, and which he has been sealing up. He desired me to remove your little table, the one at which you usually sit to the study, and his head has rested a good deal,—alas too much!—on the pillow, which he bade me bring to him from your sofa.”

“Then, Travers, if he is alone, I wish you to take this note to him. It is to tell him that I am here. I must not startle him by going in to him suddenly. You must take it to him and stay in the room while he reads it. Before he has time to forbid my going to him, I shall be in the room close behind you.”

“My dearest young lady, you must not



go to him. He has been very much excited. He will be very angry."

"Angry with me, Travers!"

"You are his guardian Angel, and you can do more with him and for him than any one—but at the present moment—indeed, I dare not."

"But you know, Travers, if he should be angry, it will only be for a moment. You know, too, that I shall do him good. Besides, I *will* go, and if you will not do me this service, I must go without it."

"I would lay down my life for you, Miss Ashford, but I cannot bear to hear a harsh word spoken to you, and at this moment my Lord is not himself."

The old man still hesitating, Matilda placed her hand gently on his arm, and, looking at him through her tears, said,

“Will you refuse to do this for me?”

“I cannot refuse to do anything for you,” he replied, and immediately passing through the parlour, closely followed by Matilda, he proceeded to the study, at the door of which he knocked somewhat timidly.

Matilda heard her father's voice giving permission to enter. Travers went in, leaving the door a little open. It had been arranged that Travers should remain in the study till Lord Ashford had read the note, and that the signal for her own entrance should be when the servant came back to the door and opened it.

At last the moment arrived when, with noiseless step, and throbbing heart, she went in and found herself alone with her father.

When he had finished reading the note, Lord Ashford threw it aside, and, without

saying a word, resumed the writing in which he was engaged.

“Papa,” said Matilda. But he neither turned his head nor moved, though she could see that he was conscious of her presence by a slight, yet to her eye, perfectly sensible contraction of the lip.

“Dearest papa,” she again repeated, in a tone of tenderness, nearly in a whisper.

This time he made an impatient gesture with his arm, but continued to write.

Matilda came round and stood by his side.

He no longer continued to write, but he did not look up.

Matilda then gently drew the pen from his hand, pushed his chair away from the table, and sitting down on his knee, threw her arms around his neck, and covered his face with her kisses.

His first impulse was to push her from him, but he checked himself. Still he did not speak.

Matilda softly, soothingly, drew towards her his averted face, and, looking sweetly into his eyes, said to him,—

“Speak to me, my father.”

“Why do you come here, Matilda?” said he, sternly.

“Because I could not keep away from you,” she replied.

“Your coming here is highly improper ; it displeases me very much : if I had wished for you I should have sent to tell you so.”

“No, papa, you *have* wished for me, yet you have not sent for me, and therefore I have come to you.”

“I wish you would learn to know your duty and your place,” replied he, with increased sternness.

“My duty is to love you; to try to make my love a happiness to you, and my place is in this bosom ;” and she laid her face in his bosom and again folded her arms around him.

She was conscious that her father made an effort to raise her head and to loosen her hold of him; but she clung to him with the greater tenderness.

In a moment the effort to disengage her ceased. She almost fancied that she felt from those reluctant arms an involuntary pressure.

She raised her head gently, and again looking him in the face, she said, “My papa, you have given me your solemn promise that I should be your chosen friend.”

“I have,” replied he, somewhat softened.

“You have not fulfilled your promise.”

“Why not?”

“Because you have been dreadfully ill, you are still ill, and what is worse, you are very unhappy ; and yet you have not sent for me.”

“My illness is nothing ; my unhappiness also is beyond ——”

“You would say beyond my reach ; or perhaps even my comprehension.”

He made no reply.

“It is this that distresses me,” she continued ; “it is this which is the cause of the only unhappiness that has ever existed between you and me.”

“What do you mean ?”

“That you will not accept my love ; that you will not allow it to enter your heart, to keep at your side, to follow your footsteps, and to surround you like the very air you breathe.”

He was again silent.

“You love me,” she continued passionately, “as we love a child—when you are happy—when nothing serious or painful engages your attention—or calls forth your energies ; but when such affliction comes as shakes your soul and endangers your life, you forget me ; you keep at a distance from me, and when I fly to you with a heart full—oh, more full than it can bear of sympathy and love, you will not even look at me, and you tell me that you have important business to perform, and that I am in your way !”

As she ended these words, she fell down at his feet in a paroxysm of uncontrollable grief ; and it required all his tenderness, which now burst forth unrestrained, to tranquillize and soothe her.

When he had succeeded in restoring her to comparative calmness, her sorrow burst

out afresh as she saw how truly ill and wretched he looked.

“Oh, let me stay with you,” she cried ; “I will go if you desire it, but, oh, do not drive me from you ; do not separate yourself from your child at a time like this.”

“I will not drive you from me ; you shall never be separated from me again !” he replied, in an agitated voice, and he pressed her to him with an overwhelming tenderness which he no longer endeavoured to control.

So remained father and daughter folded in each others’ arms several minutes.

At length Lord Ashford said,—“Tell me, my child, what has induced you to come here ?”

“Your illness.”

“How did you know that I was ill ?”

“I read the account of it in the newspapers.”



“Ah! and what else did you read?”

“Every word that was said.”

“And you believed it? Constance believed it?”

“Not for a moment. How could we believe it? But that matters not. I want to make you understand what my true feeling is. I do not desire to know any thing which you wish to conceal from me ; still I cannot pretend to be ignorant that some painful things have occurred in your life. What they are I have no conception of. How far they may be of a nature to make you sorry for the part you have taken in them I do not know. I can conceive that they may be easily misunderstood by those who are not acquainted with all the circumstances, and that they may be capable of the most cruel misrepresentation. And in the present instance, I believe that both ignorance and

malice have been at work to heap upon the sacred name of my father the foulest calumnies."

"Bless you, my child," cried Lord Ashford, "love has taught you to penetrate through the darkness; to judge of your father aright. You do not believe that he could have been guilty of the crime imputed to him."

"I do not believe that any one capable of such aims as my father, that any heart full of such affectionate love as his, can be capable of a crime. But if it were otherwise," continued she, in a low and solemn tone of voice, sinking almost to a whisper, "if he shall have done wrong—if God has permitted such a calamity—who am I to murmur against His will—to sit in judgment on his creature? My love remains unchanged; but my obligations, my duties are increased;

a new sphere is opened for my exertions, and the new duties demanded of me will purify and exalt my love, and not make me untrue to the most blessed feeling of my life."

Her father pressed her fondly to him, and she continued. "For my own part, I care for nothing but your love, and that of aunt Constance and Charles. I never pray for any other blessing except that I may keep you three, and that we may love one another. I care for nothing else ;" and she once more wept passionately.

Her father encouraged her to lay her head in his bosom, and by degrees fatigue and sorrow gave way to a soothing calm, and her eyes closed in sleep.

## CHAPTER XVI.

“ And he who faints half-way,  
Gains yet a noble eminence o’er those  
Whose feet still plod the earth with hearts o’er-  
dusted.”

R. H. HORNE.

TOWARDS the close of the following evening, when the father and daughter were sitting together in the library, and Matilda was engaged in writing for her father, a loud peal at the hall-bell announced some arrival.

Immediately afterwards quick loud steps

were heard approaching the room, mingled with voices of angry expostulation, and then a hurried knock sounded at the door, and Travers presented himself, saying: "Lord Strathfinnan, my lord, requests to see your lordship."

"Say that I can see no one," replied Lord Ashford.

But the words had scarcely passed his lips before Lord Strathfinnan rudely pushed the old servant aside, entered the room, and walked up with a hurried step, and in an excited manner, close to Lord Ashford.

"This intrusion, my lord, is both unexpected and unwarrantable," said Lord Ashford.

"You may consider it what you please," replied Lord Strathfinnan, "but I must inflict on you the inconvenience of my presence for a time. For you, Matilda,"

continued he, turning to the agitated girl, "I request of you to leave the room immediately. My business is of a nature unfitting for your ears."

Matilda drew closer to her father, and Lord Ashford answered: "By what authority do you presume to command my child in my presence?"

"Oh, just as you please; I will presume to offer no further advice," replied Lord Strathfinnan, with a sneer. "It is of no great consequence, disgraced as she is—doubly disgraced, utterly despicable as you are."

Matilda looked with terror at her father, expecting to see his violent temper roused to uncontrollable fury by such words. What was her amazement when she saw that he sunk back in his chair, pale and stricken

down, and that he was incapable of articulating a syllable.

“It is the consciousness of guilt, upon my soul,” cried Lord Strathfinnan, in a loud and furious voice. “It is an involuntary confession of the truth of the whole story;” and he walked, with impatient steps, up and down the room.

Finding that Lord Ashford still made no reply, he again walked straight up before him, in a menacing attitude, and said,

“I demand instant satisfaction for the disgrace you have brought upon my house. I require an explanation of this,—and this,—and this,” pointing to various paragraphs in the newspapers which he held in his hand. “I command you to speak, and to state what you have to say for yourself; why you should not be branded with the

infamy which Mr. Willoughby is ready to pour out upon you."

Lord Ashford rose from his seat, and stood face to face with his brother-in-law, and answered with the stern dignity habitual to him.

"Your language and your manner I do not condescend to notice. I am bound, however, to offer the explanation you desire. I am ready to give it."

"It is well, my lord," answered Lord Strathfinnan; "but before another word is said, I must repeat, that if Matilda stays here it is contrary to my express command. She may chance to hear things which may pollute her ears, and this disgrace, at least, might be spared her."

"She is a party concerned," replied Lord Ashford. "Whoever says anything in her presence unfitting for her to hear,



the disgrace falls on him, not on her."

"My father," cried Matilda, "I will not hear another word. I will not embarrass you with my presence. You know my trust and confidence——"

"Then stay and prove it."

She sat down, quietly, at her father's side.

"My reply to you," resumed Lord Ashford, addressing Lord Strathfinnan, "is, that every word contained in that paper is false, damnably false, and that the author is a lying scoundrel, who has promulgated these calumnies to serve his own purpose."

"Are you prepared to swear that no form of marriage ever took place between you and a woman who now goes by the name of Merton, and calls herself a widow?"

“ I am prepared to swear that no woman but your sister ever was my wife.”

“ Then pray what was, and who is Mrs. Merton?”

“ Any relation which I may have had with any other person, excepting your sister, is no concern of yours. Whatever information you desire respecting your family,—respecting your sister, my wife,—I feel bound to give you, truly and explicitly, to the utmost of my power. But there my obligation ceases. With my private affairs you have no business, and it is not my intention to trouble you with anything concerning them.”

“ But there is one person you will find it necessary to satisfy on this point. Unless you intend to submit the whole matter to the decision of a court of law, you must give Mr. Willoughby very exact and full

information on this subject. He is hard to be convinced. I have brought him with me. I have had the greatest difficulty to manage it; at first he declared he would have no communication whatever with you, but that he would commence legal proceedings instantly."

"I have nothing to do with Mr. Willoughby; he is at perfect liberty to take what course he pleases."

"But it is of importance to the honour of our house, and to your own, my lord, to prevent the publicity of such infamous proceedings."

"That remains to be established."

"I trusted to be able to prevail on you, my lord, to make such statements as would render it obvious to Willoughby that he would not succeed in any suit he might determine to commence against you. I will

call Willoughby, and I hope you will not disappoint my expectations."

He stepped from the room, and during his absence Matilda was about to address a few hurried, tender words to her father; but she was stopped by the sound of footsteps close to the door. Before the persons entered she sank down on a low seat at her father's feet, so screened by the table that she was scarcely to be perceived, either by Lord Strathfinnan or Mr. Willoughby.

"I have informed your lordship," resumed Lord Strathfinnan, as he led his companion into the room, "that Mr. Willoughby intends to commence legal proceedings against your lordship forthwith."

"Let him do as he pleases," replied Lord Ashford, drily. "I presume you acquainted him with my communication to you?"

“But, my lord,” said Mr. Willoughby, “your declaration is, unfortunately, invalidated by a statement which I have received from my wife’s uncle, Sir Frederick Buckton.”

“Villain!” exclaimed Lord Ashford, and turned impatiently away.

“Nay,” exclaimed Mr. Willoughby, “if you do not choose to hear me, let it be so. The suit is already in the hands of lawyers; business shall proceed.”

“Be it so,” replied Lord Ashford.

“But,” interposed Lord Strathfinnan, “it is desirable to stop it, if possible; desirable for all our sakes.”

“It is only out of regard to the brother of the deeply injured lady who was called Lady Ashford,” replied Mr. Willoughby, “that I have reluctantly, and contrary to my own judgment, consented to this inter-

view. I do not see that any good can result from continuing it."

"Read the letter," cried Lord Strathfinnan, "that letter,—Buckton's letter."

"It will be painful to me to read it in his presence," replied Mr. Willoughby, "I will only give the substance; there are expressions in it which, however natural, I am unwilling to give utterance to."

Then running his eye over the letter as if to gather its substance, Mr. Willoughby proceeded to read as follows:—

"My dear Boy,

"The particulars you request me to jot down for you are these:—Can take my oath in a court of justice, that the damned,—I beg pardon,—that Lord Ashford was privately married to a young actress, of the name of Clara Harrington, in the year

180—. Can prove this by indisputable evidence ; my own approaching marriage into his family really makes this a painful office.—Can produce the man, formerly a servant of Lord Ashford, who was one of the witnesses.—After much time and trouble have got together, and have now completed all the circumstances required to prove this marriage, and to identify Lord Ashford as being the person who, then and there, became the husband of this woman.—Not a single link of the chain is now wanting.—All ready for use as soon as wanted.—Suspected this for many years, but it is only within the last year that several gaps in the facts have been discovered.—The chain is now very neat, and, as I may say, entire.”

Here the reading of the letter ended.—Lord Ashford neither spoke nor moved.

Mr. Willoughby continued.—“ The principal facts of this case were made known to me by Sir Frederick Buckton, about a year ago, when first I had the honour of becoming acquainted with his niece, now my wife. At that time a daughter, by this woman and Lord Ashford, was alive. I felt, therefore, that I had no particular call to interfere in the matter, as, in the event of any disclosure, that young lady would have been the heiress ; but now that she is deceased, I feel it to be my duty, as heir to Lord Ashford's title, and also to the whole of his property, in case of his leaving no legitimate descendant, to establish the reality of Mrs. Merton's claim as Lord Ashford's legal wife, and thereby to set aside the claim of Miss Ashford, the daughter of the Hon. Miss Grant, of Strathfinnan, to be his lordship's heir.”



During the whole time spent in reading this letter, and while this comment was made upon it, Lord Strathfinnan stalked up and down the room like a tiger in his den. "Why the devil don't you refute this at once?" he cried, addressing Lord Ashford in a voice of fury.

"Have you anything further to say, sir?" asked Lord Ashford, quietly and coldly turning to Mr. Willoughby.

"Yes; there is another passage in Sir Frederick Buckton's letter," replied Mr. Willoughby, "which I think I must trouble you with. His words are, 'Can bear testimony to the fact, for it is consistent with my own personal knowledge, that in the year 18—, the injured lady, called Lady Ashford, had an interview with Mrs. Merton, who was at that time supporting herself by miniature painting.—Believes that on this occasion,

Lady Ashford became aware that *some* connexion existed between this person and Lord Ashford, but, of course, she remained ignorant of the fact, that any marriage had taken place between them.' By what means," continued Mr. Willoughby, " Lord Ashford prevailed upon this woman to keep his secret and to allow her rights to be usurped, is at present a mystery to us all. The probable solution of it is, that she was herself led to suppose that the marriage which took place was false and illegal. We require but her testimony to make the whole case complete. Sir Frederick Buckton, however, has communicated with her on the subject by letter; for, owing to the recent loss of her daughter, he has been unable to see her personally; but he expects every day to receive from her such an answer as will decide the question."

“Then he has not received such an answer yet?” inquired Lord Strathfinnan, somewhat drily.

“There has scarcely been time,” answered Mr. Willoughby.

“Want of time cannot be pleaded by Lord Ashford,” rejoined Lord Strathfinnan, “that is certain: he has had full time enough to consider whether he has been twice married or not: and if he has been married only once, he must have the means of proving it, and of showing—he added with a sneer—on which of these two ladies he has really conferred the honour.”

Lord Ashford now rose from his seat; advanced a few paces towards Lord Strathfinnan; drew from his bosom and opened a letter, and, without speaking, placed it in the hands of his brother-in-law.

Lord Strathfinnan opened the letter and read aloud the following words:—

“I have received an application from persons naming themselves Sir Frederick Buckton and Francis Willoughby, urging me to come forward and establish the fact, that I am your legal wife. I have made, and shall make no reply to them; but I think it right to give you information of this circumstance. I hereby disavow that I have ever been legally married to you, or that I have any claim upon you as your wife. This application to me has placed you in no real danger, but as I cannot be sure that it is not intended to injure you, I have not hesitated to apprise you of the occurrence.

“CLARA HARRINGTON.

“Signature witnessed by Leonora Castelli and Philip Weston.”

As Lord Strathfinnan finished reading these words, he burst into a loud, coarse

laugh ; tossed the letter into the air, and, advancing towards Lord Ashford, held out his hand to him, crying in a half triumphant, half mocking voice,—

“ By God, my good fellow, I congratulate you on your safe deliverance from this scrape !”

Lord Ashford turned from him with an air of indignation and loathing.

“ As you like,” continued Lord Strathfinnan, still laughing, “ but your haughtiness shall not prevent me from again offering you my congratulations. Upon my soul you are a lucky dog ! Such good fortune, now, would never have befallen me. Why, you have managed to keep up the reputation of a saint, while you have all along been enjoying the sweets of existence like any of us wicked devils ! All over now, however, that’s certain. From this time

forward, you must be content to take your rank with any of us common mortals. It is really a devilish good joke!"—and he clapped his hands with another loud laugh.

Then turning to Mr. Willoughby, he said :—

" You must pocket your loss, my boy, and permit my niece to enjoy her property in peace.—Cannot say I am particularly sorry for you; but what I cannot cease to admire, is the skill and management of my lord here, in keeping his fair friends in such excellent discipline."

" That Mrs. Merton or Miss Harrington, by whatever name you may please to call her," said Mr. Willoughby, " has been most foully deceived and most cruelly used, I have now no manner of doubt. I have seen her. I know her. I am convinced that she has never in her life been accessory

to any act of guilt or infamy. My belief is, that could she be induced to come forward, facts might be brought to light which would astound us all!"

Lord Strathfinnan was about to reply; but their further discourse was interrupted by a loud scream from Matilda, who sprung suddenly from her seat, and tried to catch hold of her father. Lord Ashford had started up with a countenance of ashy paleness, and was about to speak, when he fell down insensible on the floor.

## CHAPTER XVII.

“ He that made us, made us to this war.

\* \* \* \* \*

Though thy rash offence divorced our bodies,  
Thy repentant tears unite our souls.”

HEYWOOD.

WHEN Lord Ashford returned to a state of consciousness, Matilda was leaning over his pillow, his head resting on her arm, and Charles was standing at her side, both watching in silence, with an apprehension



that scarcely admitted of hope the apparently reviving life of the sufferer.

As he opened his languid eyes, they met those of Matilda.

A faint smile passed over his countenance, and he said, "You are with me, my child."

"I am with you, my father; Heaven has restored you to me."

"You are faithful to your friend," he continued,—“you love your father.”

"He knows that I love him," she replied, and she leant forward, and pressed his forehead to her bosom.

"Here is Charles, too," she continued. "He, also, is come to you."

"Bless him! Bless you both!" and he again closed his eyes, and sunk into a disturbed slumber.

When, after a considerable interval, he

awoke, the same watchers were near him. He was suddenly roused from sleep, apparently by a troubled dream. He looked bewildered, and cried, in a low, suppressed voice, and agitated manner,—“Are they gone?”

“No one is here,” replied Matilda, “but Charles and your child; you have both your children with you, and none else.”

“It is well,” cried he; “do not let them stay; do not permit them to repeat—to represent—it is false—they do not understand—they know a part, but they do not know all.”

“Think only of those who are dear to you,” cried Matilda.

“Ah! yes, I will—” he replied, feebly and confusedly, not conscious of the meaning of the words that fell from his lips.

“For their sakes,” continued Matilda, “think of them and live for them.”

He gazed earnestly in her face with a wild and bewildered look, and made an effort to speak, but sunk back exhausted on the pillow.

He now passed into a state rather of fainting than of sleep, his face becoming pale and his skin of a death-like coldness. This was succeeded by a profound lethargy, out of which he could not be roused ; yet, as he lay in this condition of utter physical and mental prostration, his regular and finely-chiselled features still preserved much of their former beauty, and Charles recognized in them a more striking resemblance to those of Bertha than he had ever before observed ; though the expression of suffering, so painfully depicted in the countenance, presented a most affecting contrast.

This state of stupor continued many hours, during which no nourishment was taken, and no sign of life could be distinguished, excepting that the physicians in attendance affirmed that it was still possible by attentive watching, to discern at distant intervals a faint motion of respiration. At length the clamminess of the skin appeared a little to diminish, and a somewhat greater degree of warmth was perceptible ; the respiration also became manifestly quicker and deeper, and now and then a lengthened breathing, more resembling a profound sigh than an ordinary respiratory action took place.

These signs of increasing power in the vital functions were at length followed by the return of sensibility and intelligence. He recognized Matilda and Charles ; but he appeared fearfully changed. He looked

shrunk. He had the shrivelled aspect of a person who has passed through one of those physical diseases in which, in the course of a few hours, one half of the bulk of the body appears to have been lost. Yet, as is often the case in diseases of this class, his mind was clear, and comparatively untouched by a state of the body in which the physical strength is reduced so low, that scarcely the slightest motion can be taken without the risk of the sudden and irrevocable extinction of life.

He seemed desirous to avail himself of this return of consciousness to accomplish some earnest purpose. He stopped the commencing remonstrances of Matilda and Charles that he would not exhaust himself by the effort to speak, in a manner so solemn, not to say stern, that they at once ceased to oppose him ; and approaching close to his

side, stood before him in an attitude of reverential silence.

There was as remarkable a change in his voice as in his general appearance. It had no longer the peculiarities marking it, as that which belonged to a particular individual : it was a low whisper, giving to the ear a kind of even, monotonous sound, quite unnatural and unearthly, yet perfectly distinct. It was as if that mysterious link which connects the physical instrument with the presiding intelligence, were already nearly severed, and the articulate sounds which it gave forth were inexpressibly affecting from that very suggestion.

“I have followed a shadow, and I have paid the price of it,” he said.

“There are actions, errors, crimes,” he continued after a pause, “that cannot be repaired ; the consequences of which no

time can change, and no repentance influence ; but which extend unaltered, and irrevocable, through every hour and every day to the last of life.

“ Charles, in two instances you have been an eye witness of consequences that have resulted from the one great error of my life. I did everything in my power to avert those consequences ; but I was no exception, nor could I be, to the stern law that the evil-doer cannot control the results of his wrong actions, but must submit to the doom of witnessing, ever flowing from it, consequences which he never intended, and which he would give his life to prevent or change.

“ From the day that these deplorable consequences were visited on the first victim, of whose sufferings you were a witness, I have given up hope and have wished to die ; and the forbearance and kindness of spirit com-

bined with the strength of will, which uttered no reproach, and which endeavoured resolutely, up to the very last, to conceal from my knowledge the cause of the suffering that was endured, have filled to the brim my cup of misery.

“I know that a happier fate has been mercifully granted to her—to that other sufferer, the first, the most deeply injured—so well known—so truly appreciated by you, Charles.”

He paused, and his eyes rested with an earnest, searching look on those of Charles. The young man stood for a moment irresolute whether or not to break this dreadful silence, but the holy and beloved image of Clara, purified and exalted by suffering, was called up vividly before him, and he said,—  
“The wrong done to another is sometimes the means of working out for the injured a



nobler character, and a higher happiness than could have been obtained without it. In the present instance I have seen so blessed an exemplification of this, that I hope never again to murmur at that part of the plan of Divine Providence by which evil is made the instrument and minister of good."

"I rejoice in the result," replied Lord Ashford, "but I must take no comfort to myself for it, and I do not. That is the work of the great Ruler of events, and Him I bless for it. The responsibility for the part I have taken in it remains the same. Still I have watched; yes, I have, unknown and unseen, observed her; and her angel course throughout has helped, sustained, and guided me. Tell her this, my children."

He again paused, his voice failing less

from physical exhaustion, than from the emotion that for a moment entirely overpowered him. In a short time he regained his self control, and fixing on Matilda a look of inexpressible tenderness, who on her part was struggling to keep within restraint the passionate grief that filled her heart, he said,—

“Remember—always—that your life of love has accomplished this object—it has penetrated with its own pure feeling a heart otherwise wholly lost to happiness. My Matilda, you have given me true love—and through that, you have given, yes—sometimes even to me—true happiness.”

“My father,” cried Matilda, “it is I who owe everything to you. It is your sweet and true affection that has been the happiness of my existence.”

“The happiness you have imparted,” he

replied, "has been reflected back upon yourself, and your love has thus been twice blessed."

"And you, my father, have not loved me in vain—since you have given me life, and have made my life so precious as it has been, and is—in you and for you."

"My child," he replied, in a manner which gave to his words something almost supernaturally impressive and solemn—"What I have said to you I have spoken that you may have this consolation with you—that this blessing may ever rest upon you—the blessing of your father—the blessing of your friend to whom you have imparted happiness not expected, not earned, and not deserved."

"I shall certainly die, my father, if you speak so," exclaimed Matilda, with an anguish which she could no longer control.

“The dreadful misery you have suffered, the misery that others have endured may yet be repaired, and through that reparation—through the consciousness of the happiness of those whom you have never ceased to love, and who through all have ever faithfully loved you, happiness may still be possible—may still return to us all.”

“No,” he replied, “it cannot be: it is too late—after such a course—after such events—happiness to him who has taken my part in them is not permitted. I have done with the world—with life. Tell Constance, who has been my best friend, that her devotedness to her brother has not been lost upon him. Tell her also, that now, when the world is receding from me, I see with different eyes and feel with a truer sense—though all too late.—Time has no backward step and Life but one probation.”

There was a slight movement in the room, over which the silence of death had seemed to settle as the last word fell from the pale lips and the faint eyes closed—and the two young hearts which had responded to every emotion and had watched there full of love and anguish, became aware that a third person was added to their number. It was Constance. In her countenance deep sorrow was tempered by a gleam of joy which showed that she had, unknown, been present—that she had heard the last words that had been spoken. She laid her finger on her lips, to prevent even the slightest, suppressed exclamation on the part of Matilda, while she gently passed her arm around her and remained at her side, her eyes fixed on the fast fading face which she had loved and watched from childhood. Large tears gathered in her eyes, and fell unheeded.

She trembled from head to foot, but she remained still and firm ; and the power of mind triumphing over and sustaining the fragile body, unconsciously communicated strength to the greater sufferer at her side. The dreadful fear that her father was dying—that she was really going to lose him, had never till that instant, been recognized by Matilda, and the wild agony of such an apprehension in youth is perhaps at the first moment more intense than any feeling of mature age. The presence of Constance softened in some degree this terrible moment to Matilda, and the words, “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world,” seemed breathed into her ear and heart. She bowed her head, and a prayer for help and fortitude went up to the throne of God. At that instant, Lord Ashford opened his eyes ; they met those of Constance ; a faint

smile moved his lips, and a look which she never forgot, recompensed in that moment her life of patience and love. His eye then moved, and settling on the young head still bent in prayer, they again fixed on Constance, who understood their meaning. He had said to her, "Live for her sake;" and she nerved herself with fresh courage to do the work thus set before her.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

“ As the tree  
Stands in the sun and shadows all beneath,  
So, in the light of great Eternity,  
Life eminent creates the shade of Death.  
The Shadow passeth when the tree shall fall,  
But Love shall reign for ever over all.”

TENNYSON.

“ When Faith and Love that parted from thee  
never  
Had ripened thy just soul to dwell with God,  
Meekly thou didst resign this earthly load  
Of Death, called Life, which us from life does  
sever.”

MILTON.

THE last spark of life was not extinct, but  
as they stood watching his breathing and



his sunk and sharpened features, the secret, though as yet unexpressed conviction of the medical attendants was, that consciousness would return no more. They were apprehensive of the approach of that change in the condition of the brain, always one of extreme danger, in which it can no longer receive any new definite perception ; while yet the images of past impressions, the memories of events and emotions are capable of being recalled, confusedly and incoherently, the elements of the trains of thought, the different events, the actors in them, and their names, being all strangely blended and confounded together. In some diseases, as in fever, this singular condition in which the mind, still linked to its physical organ, seems clogged and obscured by it, often continues many days ; sometimes a low scarcely articulate muttering going on, with-

out intermission, while at other times the images occasionally, and for a moment, assume a more definite form, and derive not only a distinct, but even a vivid colouring, from those passages of life that have agitated the soul.

It was into this peculiar state that Lord Ashford now passed, but it was only occasionally that delirium took the place of stupor. The words that were uttered during these periods of comparative delirium were so inarticulate, that they would probably have been incomprehensible to common hearers, but to the listeners who watched those almost motionless lips they were perfectly distinguishable. On one occasion, in the low broken murmurs, they heard the words,—

“I am not disgraced,—no,—my honour is unstained.—Strathfinnan has no ground

—She is innocent.—They cannot say she has fallen into any misconduct.—I have taken upon myself the consequences of my crime—I have paid the debt.—Willoughby's claim is simply absurd.—The slanderer,—the vile calumniator.—Oh! my God, when shall I be free!—The world,—that hard task-master,——”

Here the words were lost in inarticulate muttering.

Subsequently, after an interval of several hours, there returned suddenly, as is not unusual in this kind of delirium, a state in which thought and feeling appeared to assume a definite form, to gather round one object, and to centre in one name. It was that of Clara. The voice returned with a distinctness proportionate to the vividness of the ideas.

“Yes,” said he, “now,—come to me,

now.—It is now, Clara, that I need you. Give me, through your faithful love—help—forgiveness. — O, blessed sound!—that my soul—through you may be absolved.”

After a moment's pause he continued, —“ But stay — can she come here?— Oh, no, no, no, that cannot be — shall not be — perhaps in heaven — but not here.—No ; I will do my hard duty to the last.”

These words thrilled through the whole frame of Matilda. She cast a look of inexpressible anguish on Charles. But, suddenly, a thought seemed to strike her. She moved noiselessly to a distant part of the room, and beckoned Charles to follow her.

“ Do you think she would come to him ?” she whispered.

“ I am sure she would, if only it should be possible ; if she should be capable of doing so.”

“ Why should she not be capable ?”

“ Because she has never recovered from the shock produced by Bertha’s death. Since that event she has never left the house, and seldom her bedroom.”

“ Ah ! then she is too ill to travel !”

“ I much fear she is.”

“ But her coming may yet save his life ; no one can say it is impossible ; it is worth while to try. At all events, she may give peace to his soul.”

She immediately sat down and began to write.

When she had finished the letter, she gave it to Constance and Charles, who read as follows :—

“My father is ill—I fear dying. It would comfort him to see you. He calls upon your name. He implores your blessing. If your coming should be the means of calling him back to life—if by our united efforts we might restore him to peace—I dare not hope for such happiness. But he calls you, and in the moment of his extremity you may give him help.

“MATILDA ASHFORD.”

Charles inclosed the letter ~~in~~ one from himself to Dr. Weston, urging him and Leonora to accompany Clara if she were in a state to admit of travelling, though he expressed his fear that she was not; and he dispatched the packet by a servant whom he could trust for using the utmost speed.

There were no railways in those days,

yet from the excellent roads and the other means available for rapid travelling even then, the messenger, within the space of twenty-four hours, succeeded in placing the packet in the hands of Dr. Weston. It threw him into a state of consternation. He knew not how to deal with it. Clara was wholly incapable of obeying the summons with safety to herself—of that he had the fullest conviction. Yet she would make the attempt—that also was certain. It would, he knew, be out of his power to prevent it even if it were right to make the attempt. He had been apprehensive that she would have sunk under the agitation into which she had been thrown by the urgent and importunate applications that had recently been forced upon her by Mr. Willoughby. He dreaded the effect upon her of any communication with

Lord Ashford, though after the course she had taken he foresaw that some communication must necessarily again take place between them. But for such intelligence as this letter gave he was not prepared. The pure and beautiful spirit in which it was written touched him deeply ; yet to communicate it to Clara would be to lay upon her the last burden of woe which was required to crush her. He saw that the hour of her own fate as well as that of the man with whose destiny hers was indissolubly linked had now arrived.

In two hours after the packet had been received, the three friends were on the way to Ashford Castle.

Yet it was not until the evening of the third day after the messenger had been despatched, that the anxious and impatient watchers there observed a carriage approach-



ing the entrance. The travellers had been unable to proceed rapidly on account of Clara's weakness, and once they were obliged to stop for several hours from the absolute necessity of giving her rest. She was borne into the mansion, for she could not walk. A death-like stillness prevailed. A group of mourners with noiseless step quickly gathered round her, and stood for a moment gazing on her in silence, with affectionate and reverential feeling.

At length Matilda said—"It is not yet too late : he still lives."

"Then," replied Clara, "I am ready." And she immediately rose up with a strength that astonished all around her, and, supported only by Dr. Weston, walked with a scarcely faltering step to the chamber of death.

She stood at the side of the dying man.

He lay as if in a gentle sleep. The features still preserved their wonted beauty; the expression of the countenance was calm and peaceful, but all was rigid and motionless, as if the mission of death were already fulfilled.

Clara stood gazing on that form in wrapt attention and silence several minutes.

“Gerard,” said she, at length, in a low but clear, penetrating voice.

There was no answer by word, look, or sign.

“My Gerard!” she again cried, in a louder and more piercing tone.

All continued silent and motionless. He was dead.

At that moment a smile, such a smile as is sometimes seen on the features of the dead, and which in certain rare instances is observed to assume an expression of inexpress-

sible beauty, settled down on his countenance.

“See, see!—he feels my presence,” she exclaimed.

After gazing on him silently several minutes, she again spoke.

“All is over!” she said. “He is gone. Now he knows—already knows—what my love has been. Bertha! you will welcome him. Show him where I am standing. Tell him that I came to bless his last moments.”

There followed another long silence.

“Yes,” at length she resumed, “all is over. Both are gone. Why should I remain? My part in life is finished. We were divided in life—in death may we be united. Oh, my God, if it be thy heavenly will, take me to my beloved ones. I am ready. I come to rejoin you.”

She knelt down at the side of that bed of death, as if to pray ; she rested her head upon it. It was its last resting place ; that bed of death was her own ; her prayer was answered, and thus gently passed from the earth that pure and loving spirit.

THE END.

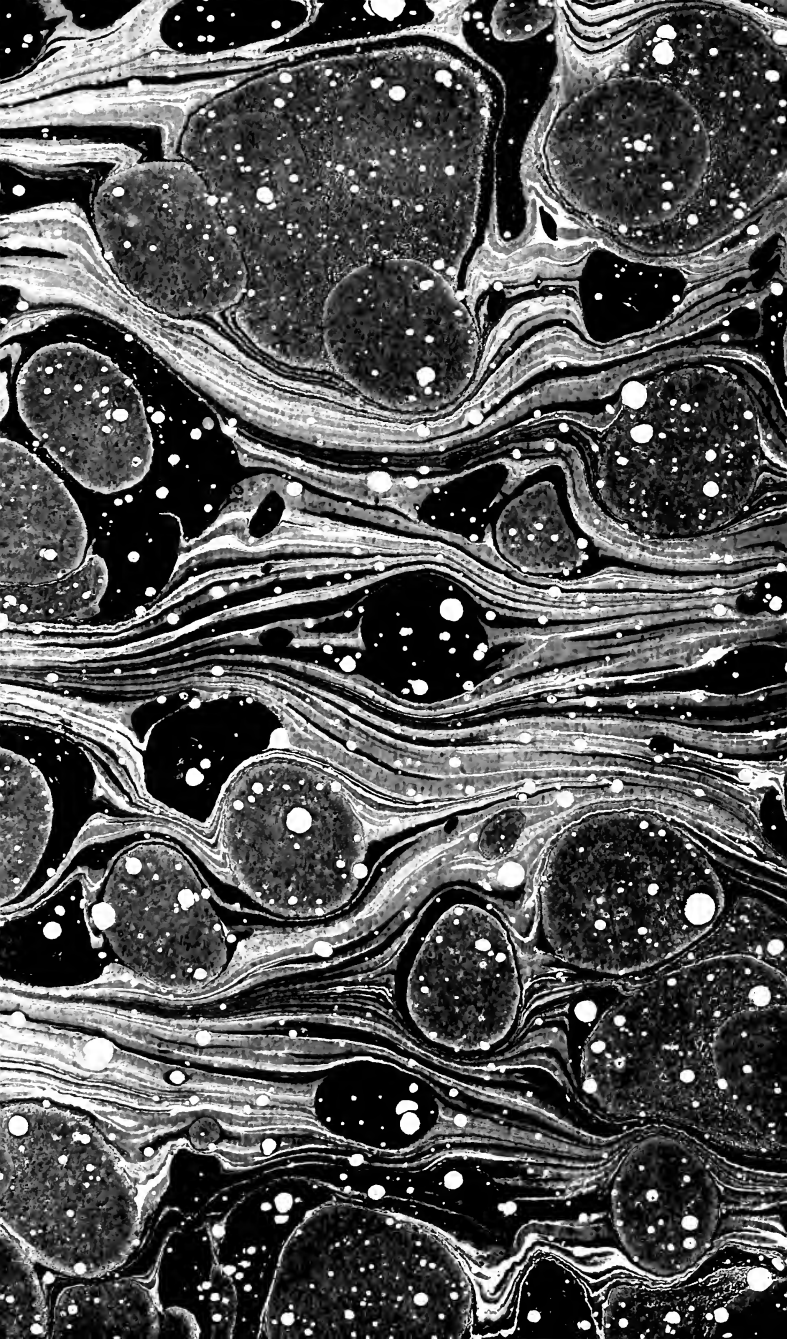
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